

ABSTRACT

Title: 'I Should go near to say he lies with her, yet She's a Maid.' From Virgins to Whores, Actresses and Portraits 1660-1737

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During the early part of the eighteenth century, a number of single, wealthy independent actresses emerged who seemed to fascinate the public and who appeared to deliberately use and cultivate that fascination to foster their careers, be they risqué or virtuous. Theatre historians have numerous contemporary accounts and scholarly speculations about the meaning of women's bodies in the public marketplace of the theatre such as Samuel Pepys's diaries, as well as the theatrical prologues and epilogues of the Restoration, which describe the fluid boundaries between on- and off-stage worlds, in the pursuit and conquest of female virtue, with portraits "painting" an ideal picture of the women. This dissertation uses another tool to understand their visual impact on the social marketplace and their own ability to manipulate their images through the study of their representation in portraiture. While live performance is fluid and thus difficult to analyze in any concrete way, portraiture offers a fixed point of reference. Unlike a written text, portraiture also captures the embodied qualities of the performer for the spectator. An exploration of these women's portraits – portraits often presenting the actresses in characters they

performed onstage – may provide clues to the created identity these actresses were presenting to the public. By shifting focus from the dramas to portraiture and painting where actresses play ‘star’ roles I hope to expand the discourse of Restoration theatre beyond the parameters of strictly literary terms, and to help illuminate and understand the visual presence of actresses and women during the Restoration period from 1660-1737.

**'I SHOULD GO NEAR TO SAY HE LIES WITH HER, YET SHE'S
A MAID.' FROM VIRGINS TO WHORES, ACTRESSES AND
PORTRAITS, 1660 -1737**

By

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
2008

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Foreword

I came to my dissertation with a strong background in the visual arts, having earned an MFA and worked professionally as both a set designer and scenic artist. I was drawn to this dissertation topic because it was dealing with images of the actress in portraits and paintings, yet as I have worked with the portraits and written on these women for the past two years, I have come to the realization that a traditional dissertation could not accomplish the goals I had outlined for the project. Thus, I proposed a re-envisioning of my dissertation in a project that would combine both the scholarly aspects of research existing in the preliminary rough draft already completed, in combination with a web based format that will allow the reader to more actively explore the portraits and information within the work. By creating an interactive form I was able to move the dissertation from a static text to an interactive web based format and enhance the project by giving the reader more interaction with the portraits of the period and being accessible as a teaching tool to help illuminate and understand the visual presence of actresses and women during the Restoration period from 1660-1737.

I suggest that using a web based format for my dissertation, I can create a format in which these portraits can be placed in juxtaposition, compared and discussed in a much more interactive way than in a traditional dissertation. Through the use of cascading textboxes I will be able to move the reader over the portraits, focusing their attention on certain points. The reader will be able to walk through the points of focus so that the reader is not just looking at portraits on the page but interacting with the portraits to understand them more fully. The cascading text

boxes are designed to appear when the reader rolls the cursor over the portrait, supplying text that corresponds to different aspects of the portrait. Thus, through these text boxes the reader gains additional information about details in the portraits that will be able to deepen the reader's knowledge of the social context and fashion of the period. By linking the pictures and text together, the reader will be able to gain a larger, in depth analysis of the fashion, context and the development incorporated in the creation of the paintings.

Further, this dissertation is not designed to be read in the traditional manner. Traditional paper dissertations are written so that the reader follows the dissertation section by section, chapter by chapter. This dissertation is created so that the reader can self direct themselves through the website following a series of different topics that are interconnected, but not sequential in the traditional manner. The subtopics will focus on areas of information, but not direct the reader through the entire dissertation. The reader can still follow the sequential path within the dissertation, but it does not allow for the exploration in the website that was intended.

I have met with several members of MITH on campus in order to discuss the possibilities of producing a web based dissertation, as well as any standards that I may need to be aware, in order to be better able to understand the wide range of possibilities and technology that it is available. When I first proposed my project one format suggested for consideration to me was the Wiki, as they are easily created and changed. Yet, the technology is limited, and I felt in this format I still would be unable to create the type of interaction with the reader and portraits I sought. Thus I have decided to use a traditional html coded website for my dissertation using some

CSS coding and javascript for various aspects, which will lend itself better to my project than a more basic format such as the Wiki. I debated on coding everything myself as a purist would do, but decided to construct my dissertation in Dreamweaver, because Dreamweaver, as the basic platform for the programming, will allow me to load in the information quickly and more efficiently, so that I can concentrate on the organization and research work. Although a large undertaking, having never worked in code on this scale, I felt that it was essential in creating my dissertation. With this new structure, the dissertation explores the complexity of the portraits not only in a written text but in a more complex interactive form that makes the visual analysis more accessible as a teaching tool to understand the Restoration actress and female Restoration portraits for a larger academic audience.

Dedication

For my children Alexander and Gabrielle so they will know they can do anything they set their minds too, and my Mother for all her support and help when I thought I would never be done.

Acknowledgements

There are many people I need to thank and acknowledge for help in this process. The first is my wonderful committee for remaining with this project as it changed and evolved, especially Dr. Heather Nathans, for her continued patients and support.

Dr. Marcy Marinelli, who always had a sympathetic ear, sturdy shoulders to lean on and an endless supply of editing skills that made me feel that this would someday be finished.

To my department dissertation group including Margaret Coyle who helped and supported so much at the start of this process.

To my colleagues and friends Carrie Cole and Valerie Joyce without whose talks, laughter and support this would have been a much grimmer process.

And finally, to my family I owe endless gratitude. My Aunt, Linda Deitrich, who read endless drafts and cheerfully edited them, always sending me encouragement. To my children and husband David for their tireless patience with my “give me one more minute to finish this up, I promise I am coming!” And finally to my parents Sharon and Terry Castle for their bottomless amounts of support and encouragement always telling me I will finish, and without whose babysitting this would have been almost impossible to accomplish.

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Introduction

Research Question: Setting the Stage

During the early part of the eighteenth century, a number of single, wealthy independent actresses emerged who seemed to fascinate the public and who appeared to deliberately use and cultivate that fascination to foster their careers, be they risqué or virtuous. Samuel Pepys's diaries, as well as the theatrical prologues and epilogues of the Restoration, describe the fluid boundaries between on- and off-stage worlds, in the pursuit and conquest of female virtue, with portraits "painting" an ideal picture of the women. These early actresses - such as Anne Bracegirdle and Nell Gwynne - culled a range of possible female identities and synthesized them into a marketable commodity. Yet, this notion of created identity is intriguing; were these early actresses capable of strategically and deliberately re-shaping the "ideal female?" Who controlled and created the actresses' identities and, more specifically, how could portraiture, and the actresses' portraits, be used as a means of understanding the created image of these early actresses?¹ Art Historian Richard Brilliant suggests, "Portraits exist at the interface between art and social life and the pressure to conform to social norms enters into their composition because both the artist and the subject are enmeshed in the value system of their society."² It is this interesting intersection that makes the portraits of Restoration actresses so intriguing.

¹ Geoffrey Squire, *Dress Art and Society 1560-1970* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), 9.

² Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991), 11.

The work for this project began with Anne Bracegirdle - who I found to be an enigmatic woman - a performer who appeared to construct her public persona and visual representation as carefully as her stage performances. She seemed to be able to manipulate her image, both on and off stage, to creatively construct an “ideal” of the perfect virgin – enticing yet unattainable. In doing so, she created a marketable commodity of her persona, to ensure both roles and suitors, both which could supply her with means of support.

As my research on Restoration actresses - and most specifically on Anne Bracegirdle - continued, I became intrigued by the notion of created identity; who controlled and created the identity and specifically how portraiture could be used as a means of understanding the created image of the actress. So, although starting with Anne Bracegirdle, my study expanded to look at a range of actresses. This dissertation focuses on the Restoration actresses who burst onto the stage in 1660-to much criticism as well as praise - and ends in the early eighteenth century. I have limited the years of my study to the years between 1660 and the enforcement of the Licensing Act of 1737 in England, because the act’s censorship brought a change in the type of drama being performed, and thus changed the public perception of the British actress. Yet ultimately, by this time, the pioneering women had become firmly entrenched as part of a new theatrical tradition. The actresses: Mrs. Mary Betterton (1661 - 1694), Nell Gwynne (1665 - 1670), Anne Bracegirdle (1688 - 1707), Elizabeth Barry (1675 - 1708), Susannah Mountfort (1681 -1703), Elizabeth Boutell (1670 - 1696), Frances Maria Knight (1684 - 1719), and Kitty Clive (1711 - 1785), seemed to possess an ability to control their own images as

“actresses,” that most women in this period were unable to achieve.³ It is difficult to even recuperate the story of the common actress because so little is left behind about them.

The more I explored Bracegirdle, and the actresses and portraits from the Restoration, I became enchanted by the array of images – some virginal, others alluring and others allegorical reflecting performances. The actresses who appear to be most successful created “personalities” in the public mind. They had the most enduring careers by linking their offstage public and private life with their onstage roles, while those legions of actresses who could not or did not develop this niche in the public eye had careers that were all but forgotten. Moreover, I suggest that the visual images of these stars - in and out of costume - played an important role in creating the “personality or stereotype” of the actress, as well as establishing their image in the public eye. The use of portraiture to further their image of propriety or promiscuity both on and off stage may have been a means to further construct their stage persona. The portraits, these visual images, prompted me to ask if these women contributed to the creation of their own identities – or were their images imposed upon them by the constraints of society and the stage? This dissertation focuses on the ways that the Restoration actresses became both “enmeshed” in the value system of the late seventeenth-century marketplace and questions the extent to which they were able to reshape the marketplace for themselves through the creation of identity the paintings of these women represented.

³ These dates are the period which they performed on stage.

Art historian Michael Ann Holly argues that “cultural historians who use works of art as their entry into an age have visible evidence of the way the period they are chronicling once gave formal shape and structure to disparate ideas, sentiments, people, facts, and fictions, the historical narrative of essential unity of the time it is attempting to portray.”⁴ By first identifying the binaries represented in Anne Bracegirdle’s career as the eternal virgin and Nell Gwynne as the irreverent whore, I will help to illuminate the breadth in between still left to uncover.

The two roles Anne Bracegirdle and Nell Gwynne took both on and off stage demonstrated the position that actresses were forced to play - virgin and whore - and were an important part of their negotiation of identity in the marketplace. This negotiation is clearly visible in the portraits as well as in the text often spoken outright to the audience in Prologues and Epilogues as Gwynne did in the epilogue to Dryden’s *Tyrannic Love* (1669), “Here Nelly lies, who, though she lived a slattern, yet died a princess, acting in Saint Catteren.”⁵ The roles were a way for the women to identify themselves to the public reinforcing the image presented in their portraits; women had gained the right to play themselves on stage, but to a large extent the selves they were playing were whores.⁶ Bracegirdle’s “creativity” as a performer lay in her talent for fusing her stage and personal identity. Audiences, having seen her play the virtuous maiden onstage, linked that image with her off-stage personality. She used the theatre as

⁴ Michael Ann Holly, *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image* (New York: Cornell University, 1996), 65.

⁵ John Dryden, Epilogue for *Love For Love* as quoted in John Harold Wilson, *All the Kings Ladies* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 89.

⁶ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama 1660 – 1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 37.

both a defense against public slander, and as an effective marketplace in which she could sell the “eternal virgin.” Gwynne’s career straddled the opposing end of the spectrum from Anne Bracegirdle’s. A natural comedian, she used her sexuality to enhance her comedic roles, as well as flaunting her ‘wares’ to the upper-class. She acquired various patrons over her short career, her most powerful acquisition being the King himself, the father of her two sons.

As the actresses created their images on stage, off stage they faced still more difficulties as they struggled to establish a respectable place in the social structure of the period, a place to which they believed their newly created identities on the public stage entitled them.⁷ Part of their difficulties arose from conflicting expectations - their own and the publics. As single women of means, they assumed a certain measure of control over their lives and sexuality. Their audiences, however, saw them not only as sexually available, but perhaps more importantly, sexually vulnerable. Tom Brown’s play - *Amusements Serious and Comical, Calculated for the Meridian of London* (1700) - targets the backstage antics of the Restoration performers and plays. His comic sketch reinforces the stereotype of actress as an available woman:

“But tis the way of the world, to have an esteem for the fair sex, and she looks to a miracle when she is acting a part in one of his own plays... if she goes to her shift, ‘tis Ten to One but he follows her, not that I would say for never so much to take up her Smock: he Dines with her almost ev’ry day, yet She’s a Maid, he rides out with her, and visits her in Publick and Private, yet She’s a Maid; if I had not a particular respect for her, I should go near to say he lies with her, yet She’s a Maid.”⁸

⁷ Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* (Carbondale: Illinois: Southern Illinois Press, 2003), 113.

⁸ Tom Brown, *Amusements Serious and Comical, Calculated for the Meridian of London* (1700), in A. M. Nagler, *A Source Book in Theatrical History* (New York: Dover Publication, Inc, 1959), 248-249.

Brown wittily criticizes the popular actresses' Anne Bracegirdle's public persona of Virginal purity, through a sardonic praise of her "virtuous nature."

Though theatre historians have numerous contemporary accounts and scholarly speculations about the meaning of women's bodies in the public marketplace of the theatre another tool to understand their visual impact on the social marketplace and their own ability to manipulate their images comes from a study of their representation in portraiture. While live performance is fluid and thus difficult to analyze in any concrete way, portraiture offers a fixed point of reference. "The opposition between subject and object is perpetually unfixed, historically on the move."⁹ Yet unlike a written text, portraiture also captures the embodied qualities of the performer for the spectator. An exploration of these women's portraits – portraits often presenting the actresses in characters they performed onstage – may provide clues to the created identity these actresses were presenting to the public. By shifting focus from the dramas to portraiture and painting where actresses play 'star' roles I hope to expand the discourse of Restoration theatre beyond the parameters of strictly literary terms.

While exploring the complicated negotiation of image in which these women were embroiled, I suggest that the Restoration actress fused her two identities, seller and object. The actress became simultaneously seller and commodity, and her success in the marketplace rested upon her ability to enact both roles and to acknowledge the dual nature of her public identity. Portraiture then became an important means by which to navigate the marketplace selling her image to the public. Art historian Richard Brilliant

⁹ Holly, *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image*, 151.

argues, “historically, portrait artists have often sought to discover some central core of person hood as the proper object of their representation.”¹⁰ Portraiture can be further understood as a means by which a community or individual represents themselves to themselves thus “..portraiture – the resolve of acts of portrayal – is always more than the sum of its parts...”¹¹ In a synthetic study of portraiture the portraits reflect not just an image of the sitter but requires “some sensitivity to the social implications of its representational modes, to the documentary value of art works as aspects of social history, and to the subtle interaction between social and artistic conventions.”¹²

This work started with a quest for agency – did these women have any agency in the creation of their own image - but evolved into more. It was not as important to prove agency as to understand the images created of these women and ultimately the intrinsic role that portraits played in the creation of these actresses’ identities. For often in the portraits of these actresses, they were not representing their own inner identity, but that of their character as many of the portraits are theatrical representations of the women, and not portraits of the actresses. The portraits give us a view into the women’s’ identities - and a deeper understanding of the social structure creating them - than can be perceived through an examination of the period plays and stories alone.

I would argue that the actresses played with this ideal, using the portraits themselves to further illustrate an identity to which the audience would relate. And further, it is important to note, that these women need to be understood by as much as

¹⁰ Brilliant, 67.

¹¹ Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 4.

¹² Brilliant, 11.

what is not said about them as by what is. With so little known about the lives and careers of these early actresses, portraiture becomes an important tool that should be used in examining the lives and careers of these intriguing women. Thus, my emphasis on portraiture is an additional means by which to gain insight and information in the creation of the women's identity.

Previous Scholarship

Because the Restoration marked the moment in England when most historians agree actresses first appeared on the public stage, Restoration actresses have always received a great deal of critical attention. However I am proposing to study the actresses in a different light than in these previous works. The purpose of many of these works is to establish the place of actresses in the theatre during this period, the types of roles they played and the function they performed within the acting company. Yet, these works do not look at the actress as possessing any agency in the creation of her own identity, nor look at how the actresses' identity is created in the marketplace. I propose that through the examination of the portraiture, roles and plays constructed for these actresses, it is possible to understand more clearly how these mediums could be used to create the actresses' marketable identities.

Discussions of actresses' lives and careers appeared in larger works on Restoration theatre such as William Oldys *The History of the English Stage, From the Restoration to the Present Time, a large general history of the English stage*, as well as in Robert D. Hume's work *The London Theatre World: 1660 - 1800*, and J. Douglas Canfield and Deborah C. Payne's work *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-*

century English Theater.¹³ There exists a large and comprehensive body of work that focuses on the performance and staging of Restoration Drama. The range of works from Jocelyn Powers *Restoration Theatre Production* to *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre* each offer a basic understanding of the staging practices and the role actresses played in performance.¹⁴ Most of these works note the importance of the emergence of the actress on stage during this period, and how their presence transformed Western theatre, but since their main focus is not Restoration actresses but Restoration theatre, actresses are a cursory side note to a larger topic.

Yet finding answers to these questions I have posed – who created identity, who controlled the actresses’ on and off stage identity, and did these women possess agency to create their own visual identities - proved to be more difficult than I first assumed. Works such as John Harold Wilson’s *All the Kings Ladies* often take the previous misrepresentations about Restoration actresses at face value – that actresses most often were prostitutes and whores. His work offers solid biographical information about the actresses and roles they performed, but often reduces the women to sexual pawns easily manipulated by the theatre owners, the playwrights and the audience. Wilson further enforces the stereotypical views of actresses arguing “since so many of the early actresses

¹³ William Oldys, *The History of the English Stage, From the Restoration to the Present Time. Including the Lives, Characters and Amours, of the Most Eminent Actors and Actresses. With Instructions for Private Speaking: Wherin the Action and Utterance of the Bar, Stage and Pupit are Distinctly Considered*. 1741. Reprint, William S. and Henry Spears, 1814. Robert D. Hume, ed. *The London Theatre World, 1660-1800*. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980). J. Douglas Canfield and Deborah C. Payne, ed. *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theater* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

¹⁴ Jocelyn Powell, *Restoration Theatre Production* (London: Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984). Simon Callow, *Acting in Restoration Comedy* (New York, NY: Applause Theatre Books, 1991). Deborah Payne Fisk, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theater* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

lived abandoned lives, it was the general conviction that all actresses were “made of Play house flesh and blood,” unable to withstand the charms of a “powerfull Guinne” – in short, “actress” and “whore” were effectively synonymous. From this conviction the reputation of the actress was to suffer for the following two hundred years.”¹⁵ And yet, while Wilson acknowledges the stereotype, he implicitly accepts its universality, not challenging these early stereotypical representations, but rather on some level reinforcing them. This history, written in the late 1950s, is reflective of many of the histories from this period, which view the actresses from the dominant male perspective. This is a reductive assessment of these women. It disregards the intelligence and creativity that these early actresses must have possessed in order to navigate a perilous tightrope between public notoriety and private life.

In addition to Wilson’s work, Rosamund Gilder’s *Enter the Actress: The First Women in the Theatre*, gives basic biographical information on the early actresses starting from the 1660s, and offers stories pertaining to their lives. Since these works are from the earlier half of the 20th century, it is not surprising that they appear dated. Nor do they offer any indepth discussion of the actresses’ portraits, their images or their roles in culture and society.¹⁶

¹⁵ John Harold Wilson, *All the Kings Ladies* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 21.

¹⁶ Wilson focuses on the first actresses in 1660 until 1689. He gives basic biographical information on a large index of women performing in this time period listing the roles they played and the shows in which they performed. He discusses some of the actresses I will be exploring, Elizabeth Barry, Anne Bracegirdle, Mary Betterton, Elizabeth Boutell, Susannah Mountfourt and Nell Gwynne. Rosamund Gilde, *Enter the Actress: The First Women in the Theatre* (New York: Book for Libraries Press, 1931), Reprint, (New York: Theatre Arts books, 1971), has one chapter that focuses on Mary Betterton, Nell Gwynne and the first restoration actresses. It cannot be too indepth however, for the Restoration actresses are only a chapter in a much larger project.

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s scholars began taking an active interest in examining the ways in which women were often misrepresented by the popular ‘male’ histories of earlier generations. This prompted a new examination of the lives and careers of Restoration actresses. Several dissertations were written which focused on some of the same actresses that I will be exploring. The scope of these works - as exemplified in Cynthia Lowry’s *The Acting Styles of Ellen Gwynne, Anne Oldfield, Elizabeth Barry, Anne Bracegirdle, and Mary Saunderson Betterton*¹⁷ - focused on the acting styles of these actresses and not their self styled image on and off the stage. There was then an almost twenty year gap before any substantial dissertations again focused on Restoration actresses.

Although several works in recent years have focused specifically on Restoration actresses - including Elizabeth Howe’s *The First English Actress*, and most recently Cynthia Lowenthal’s *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* - neither fully address the questions I am exploring.¹⁸ Although these works focus explicitly on the Restoration actresses, neither looks closely at how the women created their own representations; their focus explores different aspects of the actresses’ careers and lives. Howe discusses the political and social reasons that actresses came to the stage, as well as the effects the actresses had on the drama of the age. Lowenthal explores the dynamics between the genders on stage and in the plays themselves. Her primary focus is not the performers, but how the playwrights are constructing gender on stage, not how

¹⁷ Cynthia Rene Lowry, *The Acting Styles of Ellen Gwyn, Anne Oldfield, Elizabeth Barry, Anne Bracegirdle, and Mary Saunderson Betterton* Thesis, MA., Austin State University, 1973.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama 1660 – 1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* (Carbondale: Illinois: Southern Illinois Press, 2003).

gender is created by the actors and actresses. Kristina Straub's work *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth Century Players and Sexual Ideology* also revolves around the literature, and not the women creating the characters.¹⁹

In her essay, "Questions for a Feminist Methodology in Theatre History," Tracy Davis suggests that "like prostitutes, actresses confronted the sexual double standard daily, in public. While they might be feminists' heroic prototypes, their independence, courage, and transcendence turned sourly into dependence, compromise, and barely tolerated survival."²⁰ Davis's bleak assessment of the fate of female performers establishes them as marginalized and powerless, having always to be conscious of the scrutiny of their image in the public eye. She suggests that the actresses' power in their culture can be understood only by their ability to navigate and prosper within the confines of a "complex network of attitudes and practices."²¹ To understand fully the place of the actress within the confines of the society in which they existed, Davis argues that the scholar must also consider the issues of class gender and "social mores [to] understand the actresses' stigma as a socially produced meaning that served the interests of particular social groups to the disadvantage of female performers themselves."²²

Although offering a strong foundation to build on, these works assume certain inherent limits on the actresses' authority. In examining the historical positioning of the

¹⁹ Kristina Straub, *Sexual Suspects: Eighteenth Century Players and Sexual Ideology* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992).

²⁰ Tracy C. Davis, "Questions for a Feminist Methodology in Theatre History," in Thomas Postlewait and Bruce McConachie, eds, *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance* (Iowa City, University of Iowa Press, 1989), 59.

²¹ Davis, *Actress As Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture*, 165.

²² Davis, *Actress As Working Women: their Social Identity in Victorian Culture*, xvi. Davis' argument is similar to Pecks in *Figures of a Whig Nation: Actresses and Ideology in Augustan England* (Anne Bracegirdle, Anne Oldfield, Charlotte Charke) mentioned previously.

Restoration Actresses in theatre history, the portraits of the actresses from this period as well as the examination of economic and social evidence and the existing historical dramas are useful in understanding the power dynamics at play in the creation of their image. These women were thinking, intelligent, creative artists and Davis's analysis seems to discount this; thus while Davis offers a framework to examine the Restoration actress within her culture, my work needs to go further to fully explore the portraits of the actresses from this period and how these women created their identities.

Pat Gill's *Interpreting Ladies: Women, Wit, and Morality in the Restoration Comedy of Manners* discusses how actresses' notoriety helped to popularize the roles they played on the Restoration stage, giving more understanding to how the audiences understood the women and the roles they played on and off the stage.²³ Works such as Gill's focuses on how actresses helped to create strong women characters, but their focus is not on how the women's public image was created through the manipulation of their on and off stage images.

I have found in editor Robyn Asleson's *Notorious Muse: The Actress in British Art and Culture, 1776 – 1812*²⁴, a model for analysis similar to the one I am creating. In Asleson's work - - a compilation of articles created from a conference '*Performing Arts: Alliances of Studio and Stage in Britain*' -- the authors analyze the portraiture and paintings of Sarah Siddons (and other actresses of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century era) as a means of understanding the actresses, "in their reciprocally

²³ Pat Gill, *Interpreting Ladies: Women, Wit, and Morality in the restoration Comedy of Manners* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994).

²⁴ Robyn Asleson, *Notorious Muse: The Actress in British Art and Culture, 1776 – 1812* (Yale University Press, 2003).

beneficial relations with the artist's studio."²⁵ Asleson notes, "female performers were a vital force in the world of images (no less than the world of drama) during a pivotal period in British aesthetic and theatrical culture."²⁶ The focus of Arleson's work is on actresses of the late eighteenth century and "how Sarah Siddons virtually erases the memory of these precursors in establishing her representation of herself as the first truly virtuous female representative of the dramatic arts and of tragedy."²⁷ Although Siddons is a strong representation of female virtue, her early predecessors of the seventeenth century created the stage and setting for Siddons to become so memorable.

Comparatively little interest has been paid to Restoration actresses in recent scholarly articles. It seems that as scholarship on theatre history changed, and an interest in historiography increased, historians again began to look at the early actresses, exploring their place in theatre history. In 1992 *The Drama Review* published Thomas A. King's "*As if (She) Were Made on Purpose to Put the Whole World into Good Humor: Reconstructing the First English Actresses*," which explores "the eroticization of the actresses." King argues that the emphasis placed on the actresses' personal lives, was turned by the mid-eighteenth century, from a specific tactic to contain the actresses' upward mobility into a more generally eroticized notion of the actresses' "innate" talent."²⁸ King's article is an exceptional one, in that unlike many others, it explores the creation of the actress as a concept, rather than adhering to straightforward biographical or literary analysis. He focuses on the ways in which, during the Restoration, the "learned

²⁵ Asleson, 15.

²⁶ Asleson, 15.

²⁷ Asleson, 4.

²⁸ Thomas A. King, "As if (She) Were Made on Purpose to put the Whole World into Good Humor: Reconstructing the First English Actresses," *The Drama Review* 36, no. 3 (1992), 78.

performance techniques, spectatorship, and historiography have reinforced each other to create an official language of theatrical talent still shaping our training and reception of actresses today.”²⁹ The basis of his argument, however well formed, attributes very little agency to the actress. I suggest that while there may be no substantial proof that the women possessed agency in the creation of the portraits, it is a more complicated issue than having agency or not having agency, an issue that is difficult to fully gauge by the information that survives from the period. I would suggest that agency may not be the correct term, but that a more nuanced and accurate term to use may be awareness. It seems possible that the woman did possess an awareness of the commodity their images created, and that the images could be manipulated and sold in the marketplace. Yet, this does not mean that they did or did not obtain agency over the creation and distribution of this image, but that they may have had an awareness of the way their images were manipulated and corrupted and that the actresses may not have just been passive dolls in the process.

James Peck also presents an interesting thesis in his 1999 dissertation *Figures of a Whig Nation: Actresses and Ideology in Augustan England (Anne Bracegirdle, Anne Oldfield, Charlotte Charke)*.³⁰ While his work discusses actresses’ performances, it focuses on their importance as a political cog in the larger machinery of change in national identity. Most recently James Peck’s essay “Albion’s “*Chaste Lucrece*”: *Chastity, Resistance, and the Glorious Revolution in the Career of Anne Bracegirdle*,” discusses how actresses played a part in building British nationalism between the

²⁹ King, 96.

³⁰ James Peck, *Figures of a Whig Nation: Actresses and Ideology in Augustan England (Anne Bracegirdle, Anne Oldfield, Charlotte Charke)*. Ph. D. Dissertation (New York University, 1999).

Restoration and the ascension of William and Mary.³¹ Bracegirdle was especially important because her portrayal of chastity reinforced the morals and virtue of the new reign. Interestingly, Peck sees her as a pawn in a larger political struggle to create a Whiggish identity for the nation, but gives her no credit for manipulating her own image to her own purpose.

In the past five years there has been an increasing interest in representation of women in Restoration dramas. Works such as Rebecca Crow Lister's *Wild thro' the Woods I'le Fly: Female Mad Songs in Seventeenth-Century English Drama*, touches briefly on the actresses at the start of the Restoration but focuses mainly on madness as a recurring theme in Restoration drama. Amy Elizabeth Scott-Douglas' *Prefacing the Poetess: Gender and Textual Presentation in Seventeenth-Century England (Katherine Philips, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, Aphra Behn)* are limited mainly to Restoration drama and staging of the restoration plays.³² Her work discusses Prologues and Epilogues and the manner in which they represent women in a more sympathetic manner when written by women. There appear to be no recent works focusing specifically on portraiture of the Restoration actress or the Restoration actresses' creation of their own image on and off the stage.

The literature on portraiture is vast, and I have concentrated my research on how portraiture was used in the Restoration and how portraits as an art form were read by

³¹ James Peck, "Albion's 'Chaste Lucrece': Chastity, Resistance, and the Glorious Revolution in the Career of Anne Bracegirdle," *Theatre Survey* vol. 45, no. 1 (May 2004), 89-113.

³² Rebecca Crow Lister, *Wild Thro' the woods I'le Fly: Female Mad Songs in Seventeenth-Century English Drama* The Florida State University MA 1997. Amy Elizabeth Scott-Douglass, *Prefacing the Poetess: Gender and Textual Presentation in Seventeenth-Century England (Katherine Philips, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, Aphra Behn,)* Ph. D. Dissertation, 2000.

contemporary viewers. Richard Brilliant's work *Portraiture* offers a basic overview of how portraiture is used throughout history.³³ He explains that portraiture has not always served the same purpose, emphasizing that the scholar must understand the function of portraits within the period under investigation. I found Brilliant's work useful to position my paintings in their historical context. He states that one must understand the culture that has created the painting and the context in which it was created in order to understand the significance of the painting.

In her work *Hanging the Head*, Marcia Pointon suggests that in order to understand how portraits were understood by their contemporaries, it is necessary to not only examine individual portraits but to excavate the portraiture system; learn how that system is shaped and defined by terms of class and gender, for in "semiotic terms, portraiture is langue and portraits are parole . . . It is none the less useful for suggesting portraiture not merely as a national language but also as an ideological mechanism."³⁴ Thus semiotics, the study of signs in the form of words objects images and gestures, is useful in understanding portraiture, by exploring the images in a larger semiotic sign system of cultural values.

I found Art Historian Michael Ann Holly's work *Past Looking: Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image* a useful model in examining the portraits of the Restoration actress.³⁵ Holly discusses ways in which historians can use portraits to gain an understanding of the culture that produced the works. "The act of interpretation,

³³ Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books limited, 1997).

³⁴ Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth – Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 4.

³⁵ Holly, 65.

of course, must always be an appropriation, a forcing of either the work or an aspect of the past to fit the needs of the interpreter. Yet the interpreter, in that very act of appropriation, can similarly be seen as altered by the encounter.”³⁶ How can the actresses’ portraits be interpreted, and does the appropriation of these portraits ultimately color any understanding of the time period in which the portraits were created or the understanding of the women gleaned from the portraits images? How do the actresses establish their social position? Can it be through the manipulation of their portraits and images to create a profitable public persona? How do historians interpret the portraits of these women and is it ultimately possible to establish any sense of agency that the women may have possessed? It is these questions I am ultimately interested in exploring.

Art Historian Leon -Battista Alberti observes in *On Painting* that “Painting possesses a truly divine power in that not only does it make the absent recent (as they say of friendship), but it also represents the dead to the living many centuries later.”³⁷ This is what drew me to this project, as though the paintings were speaking to me - whispering the identities and desires of these women - I had become intrigued by the myriad array of actress portraits from this period and the personality differences they seemed to portray to the audience.

³⁶ Holly, 65.

³⁷ Leon – Battista Alverti, *On Painting*, Trans. Cecil Grayson, Intro Martin Kemp (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 20. The text exists in both Latin and Italian versions, although Kemp points out that while “very occasionally the Italian helps the clarify the meaning of the Latin, . . . it is generally the case that the original text conveys Alberti’s sense with more precision.”

Methodology/ Approach

Bourdieu suggests “every material inheritance is, strictly speaking, also a cultural inheritance. Family heirlooms not only bear material witness to the age and continuity of the lineage and so consecrate its social identity, which is inseparable from performance over time: they also contribute in a practical way to its spiritual reproduction, that is, to transmitting the values, virtues and competences which are the basis of legitimate membership in bourgeois dynasties.”³⁸ Thus, in this dissertation I will explore the actresses’ portraits in three distinct ways. First, since previous scholars have offered semiotic readings of seventeen and eighteen century portraiture, I will use these studies to give a sound foundation by which to explore and analyze the poses and the symbolism present in the portraits. Semiology, as adapted from the study of linguistics, analyzes the paintings in terms of signifier and signified, giving meaning to them beyond representation of a specific person, meaning that can be related to a larger social system of signs. However, my focus in this dissertation is not strictly a semiotic reading of the portraits. Thus I will also discuss the use of physiognomy during this period. Although popular throughout history as a means of identifying a person’s inner character through the analysis of their facial features, physiognomy has lost influence in recent years with art historians. This analysis will also include a discussion of clothing, dress and ornamentation. It is important to understand the popular dress during the period to understand how it is used and changed in the portraits. Finally, I will explore a transactionable history of the paintings, one in which the sitter and the artist have

³⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. R. Nice (London and New York, 1986), 76-7.

influence on the staging of the portrait and the message being conveyed. My analysis will include a social and cultural history that probes the structure which welcomed the women to the stage at the same time it condemned them for their public lives, discussing the market place they women entered into, and its importance in a transactionable history of the portraits. Ultimately, an important question to ask is how and what do these paintings represent about the actresses they portray? I am interested in whether these women - in a system that rendered them little more than pretty puppets – could create and exert control over their public image, through the creation of an on and offstage identity.

Chapter Structure

In order to answer the questions I have posed in this introduction – How do we interpret the actresses’ portraits? Are the portraits parts of a complicated negotiation in the marketplace to establish a profitable image? Does our appropriation of the portraits color our understanding of the time period in which they were created? What is the importance the portraits convey about the actresses? The dissertation is divided into the following chapters.

Chapter One- Enter the Actress

When the theatre companies re-opened in 1660, with the restoration of the monarch Charles II, it was with the expectation that performances would proceed as they had in the past - with skilled male actors playing female roles. The advent of the English actresses in late 1660s completely transformed the actor audience dynamic. The first

chapter explores the entrance of these actresses to the stage, and examines the marketplace that made this entrance possible.

Chapter Two – Understanding the Portraits

Chapter two discusses the importance of portraiture during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The chapter focuses on the types of analysis used on portraits and how the marketplace affects the distribution of portraits. Because my work focuses on portraiture as a means of understanding the created image of the actresses, part of my study necessarily entails an examination of the female form and fashion in the Restoration period. In an exploration of actresses portraiture it is not enough to study the popular fashion, as the actresses were often painted in specific costumed roles as well as “themselves,” thus both types of fashion must be addressed to give a more complete understanding of their representation.

Chapter three - Case Studies in Virgins and Whores - Bracegirdle vs. Gwynne

In this chapter I will explore the process of creative self invention of both Anne Bracegirdle and Nell Gwynne, tracing their skillful manipulation of both dramatic texts and artistic conventions of the period. These actresses culled a range of possible female identities and synthesized them into a marketable commodity. An exploration of these women’s portraits – portraits often presenting the actresses in characters they performed

onstage – may determine clues to the created identity these actresses were presenting to the public. This chapter will be divided into two parts - biographies of the actresses, followed by a discussion of the portraiture that can only make sense when viewed in the context of the biographies.

Chapter four: Filling the Spectrum

Chapter Four will explore the biographies of seven actresses whose careers cover the range of years between 1660 - 1737. It will analyze their portraits and biographies and explore why they did not or could not acquire the notoriety of Bracegirdle and Gwynne. I suggest that part of their failure stemmed from their inability to capture the “public eye.” They were never able to create a sustainable and “copyrighted” visual image - such as Bracegirdle and Gwynne accomplished - thus making them immediately identifiable beyond a very specific audience.

Chapter five: Conclusion

The conclusion focuses on how the first English actresses paved the way for the actresses who followed them, establishing a means by which they could navigate the emerging marketplace and maintain agency in the creation of their own image. Although throughout the eighteenth century the roles women played on stage continued to objectify them, early actresses created the foundation upon which the actresses would manipulate

their images on and off the stage allowing those actresses that followed to possess a greater measure of control in shaping their public image. This control is ultimately epitomized in the great Sarah Siddons.

Navigational Information

This page shows the various routes that can be followed throughout the site. Each route will be directed according to a general topic except for the Sequential. The Sequential route will lead the reader through a traditional reading of the site.

Portrait Navigation Page - This page links you to the Image Collection of Portraits as well as the Writings on Portraits. Choose the Portrait Collection link to take you to the Portrait Collection Navigation Page. Choose the Portrait Writings link to take you to the Portrait Writings Navigation Page.

Marketplace Navigation Page -This section looks at the actresses and their place in the marketplace. This page links you to the section on the marketplace. Choose from the links on the Marketplace Navigation Page that will direct you to the various sections on the marketplace.

Actress Navigation Page - This section will allow you to follow the information on actresses through the site. The links on the bottom left on the actress navigation page

will take you to the various Actresses Portrait Pages and the links on the bottom right follow the Writings on Actresses.

Fashion and Dress Navigation Page - This page links you to the Image Collection of Fashion as well as the Writings on Fashion. Choose the Fashion Images link to take you to the Portrait Collection Navigation Page. Choose Fashion Writings to take you to the Fashion Writings Navigation Page.

Sequential Navigation Page - This section allows you to follow the dissertation sequentially through the site chapter by chapter. Use the Chapter Links on the left of that page to follow the dissertation in a sequential fashion.

Each page in the website contains links back to the Introduction and Navigation pages along the left side of the screen, as well as links that lead to the Endnotes and the Bibliography along the lower right hand section of the page. The Endnotes can also be accessed when reading the text by mousing over the links which will then popup the Endnote information. The Endnote boxes can then be closed by activating the close button.

Page Layout

The navigation bar on the left hand side of the page is repeated throughout the website and can be reached from any page within the website. This navigation bar lists the main routes that can be taken through the web site - the Portrait Navigation Page, the

Marketplace Navigation Page, the Actress Navigation Page, the Fashion and Dress Navigation Page and the Sequential Navigation Page. Each of these Navigation pages will lead the reader through a specific series of pages in the site. The home page will return the reader to the first page - the entrance page and the Navigation link will return the reader to the Main Navigation Page if they wish to start from the beginning again.

The Bibliography and Endnotes links can be found at the bottom of each page. They will take you to the Bibliography and Endnotes Navigation page.

The link Top at the bottom of the page will return the reader to the top of the page.

The Previous and Next links will return the reader to the previously read page or onto the next page within a series of pages.

Chapter 1: *Enter the actress*

For theatre historians, 1660 -- the Restoration of Charles II -- marks the moment when actresses first moved onto the English stage. Controversial and unknown they struggled to establish their cultural legitimacy. The appearance of actresses on the English stage is an event that changed theatre history in the western world - redefining the way in which the audience looked at the performers, and reestablishing the gender roles the performers displayed to the public.

Art Historian Richard Brilliant states that “looking at time past is never a simple chronological act. Always and forever the figural imagination has been there before us. And if we see the past at all, it is in large part because it has yielded us the images with which to look.”³⁹ Looking into theatre history then is not just examining the theatres, but understanding the cultural atmosphere surrounding the theatres in the late seventeenth century.

The transforming marketplace of the late seventeenth century affected the way in which the actresses’ identities were created on and off stage at the beginning of the eighteenth century. As England’s fledgling capital marketplace became what historian Jean-Christophe Agnew has described as performance-driven or spectacle-driven, women were increasingly excluded from an atmosphere perceived as potentially corrupting or

³⁹ Holly, 151.

dangerous to their character, the public market places.⁴⁰ Yet, Agnew forges an explicit link between the market and theatre in late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth century English thought, suggesting that the two become inextricable in the public mind. This fusion of theatre and market may have challenged actresses to play dual roles - their onstage characters and their 'created' offstage personas. As Agnew notes, "The professional theatre . . . became in effect a 'physiognomic metaphor' for the mobile and polymorphous feature of the market."⁴¹ Thus, the actresses emerging on the stage faced a difficult struggle. How could the actress, whose profession required not only the display of her body in a public forum but, one in close proximity to these same "sordid" markets, create a definition of womanhood that would be both a viable commodity and a viable identity?

The cultural atmosphere that surrounded the theatre during the last half of the seventeenth century cultivated an aura of explicit sexuality which provided easy access to the women housed within. This open access was chronicled in the diaries of the period, most notably in Samuel Pepys's diaries. He often visited the tiring house of the Restoration theatres, interacting with the performers and recording his impressions of the actresses who reigned there. Often the performances he admired were not the ones occurring onstage, but the performances the women gave offstage in their interactions with the men who frequented their "private" dressing areas. Pepys describes the actresses, "But, Lord! To see how they were . . . painted would make a man mad, and did make me

⁴⁰ Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 12.

⁴¹ Agnew, 129.

loath them; and what base company of men comes among them, and how lewdly they talk!”⁴²

The easy access to the female performers for male audience members raises interesting questions about the awareness Restoration actresses may have possessed about their own performances of self. Did this easy access blur the on and offstage boundaries? Did the actresses, with the realization that there would be a large male audience backstage as well as onstage, perform the “role of actress” even after the play was done? Did these actresses, including Nell Gwynne, Anne Bracegirdle, Mrs. Betterton and the other female stars of the late 1600s “act in a thoroughly calculating manner, expressing [themselves] in a given way solely in order to give the kind of impression to others that is likely to evoke from [the audience] a specific response?”⁴³

I suggest that the women were creating a performance both on and off the stage. “Performance” as defined by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, is “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants.”⁴⁴ Arguably both on and off stage these actresses were “performing” to influence their audience. Pepys’ description of the actresses backstage suggests that the women may have been aware of their own performance of self. Or one could argue that the professional demands of the actresses’ roles created “a well-designed impression of a particular kind, even when they may be neither consciously nor unconsciously disposed to create such an impression?”⁴⁵

⁴² Lord Braybrooke, ed. *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (London : Simkin, Marchall, Hamilton, Kent, nd.)

⁴³ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday Press, 1959), 6.

⁴⁴ Goffman,), 15.

⁴⁵ Goffman, 6.

It is virtually impossible to know the intentions of the actresses. There is no clear evidence demonstrating whether or not the backstage “role playing” is conscious or unconscious, with the surviving documents - such as Pepys’ diaries-inconclusive at best. Thus, in order to better understand the actresses role during the Restoration, it is crucial to understand the social and political atmosphere of the seventeenth century that created the conditions for these first actresses to come onto the stage.

Section 1: Preparing the Stage - Pre-interregnum

The medieval market had been both a physical and social place in which commerce was transacted. By the 1600s the traditional and ‘personal’ marketplace of English culture had evolved into a proto-capitalist one. By the sixteenth century this market had shifted “ and “market now referred to the acts of both buying and selling, regardless of locale, and to the price or exchange value of good and services.”⁴⁶ The guilds diminished in strength and power diminishing the apprenticeship system once in place, and the market grew to a larger expanding ideal beyond the physical marketplace. As Jean-Christophe Agnew has argued, “whereas the classical and medieval definitions of the market described a society that placed exchange at the threshold, seventeenth century usage intimated an exchange that put society at the threshold, translating the infinitely various contents of that society into a rich and readily transactionable stock.”⁴⁷ The market was no longer a specified place, but conditional

⁴⁶ Agnew, 41.

⁴⁷ Agnew, 53.

only on the exchange of marketable items and disposable income. And with this shift, a new marketplace evolved in England and ideals about the place of men and women in society began to change. “The legitimacy of the marketplace as a social institution was inseparable from its theatricality, for the medieval criteria of authority and authenticity required that both attributes be bodied forth, deliberately displayed, performed, and witnessed. The marketplace of the middle ages, like the vernacular theater that had grown up within its bounds, was above all a . . . place for seeing. Visibility was its indispensable property.”⁴⁸ The developing marketplace is central to a discussion of theatre during this period. With this transformation came a shift in traditional gender roles as well. Further due to the “simultaneous growth in prostitution and in the marriage markets of the sixteenth century, Elizabethans began to look to the theater to represent a society thus opened to considerations of price.”⁴⁹

During the seventeenth century men continued to exclude women from their public and professional lives but recognized women’s growing importance in the private sphere of the home; women began to be defined as vital in their domestic space though remaining absent from the public. As business transactions were conducted in increasingly impersonal and distant markets, farther away from women’s domiciles, women’s isolation from men’s public and professional life became underscored. So as this proto-capital world grew more sordid, extending further away from home and hearth,

⁴⁸ Agnew, 40.

⁴⁹ Agnew, 129.

the role of women as guardians of the private sphere was reinforced, stigmatizing the market place as a space that would corrupt and ruin the “ideal woman.”⁵⁰

Yet this did not mean that women were entirely absent from the public marketplace. Lower class women did work to help support themselves and their families. Even the theatre included some performances by women during the early part of the seventeenth century. “Women from the continent had, of course been seen before as entertainers, mostly as rope dancers, tumblers and mummers, though there was a tradition of participation by English ‘wyvves of the toune’, particularly in the medieval Chester passion plays.”⁵¹

When the first women had stepped onto the public English stage in the early seventeenth century, not all members of the public were enamored with the theatre and its influence on culture or the sight of these foreign women on the stage. The Puritan William Prynne complained, “They have now their female-players in Italy, and other foreign parts – and in Michaelmas 1629 they had French women-actors in a play personated at Blackfriars, to which there was a great resort.”⁵²

“Gladam I to say,” gloated another staunch Puritan Thomas Brand “they were hissed, hooted, and pippin-pelted from the stage, so that I do not think they will soon be ready to try the same again. All virtuous and well disposed persons in this town” were “justly offended at these women or monsters rather, exiled from their own countries.”⁵³

Despite the outrage against women on stage as something unnatural, there seems to have

⁵⁰ Agnew, 40.

⁵¹ Sandra Richards, *The Rise of the English Actress* (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1993),1.

⁵² John Doran, *Annals of the English Stage, From Thomas Betterton to Edmund Kean, Volume I* (New York: AC Armstrong & Son, 1886), 50.

⁵³ Doran, 50.

been a growing interest and demand for the phenomenon among the higher classes at least.⁵⁴ In contrast to the English public stages, the court masques, with their private performances, incorporated women. James I enjoyed the mask, and his wife as well as other noble women would participate in the masque, dancing in the performances.⁵⁵

Class status however, did not protect the courtly women from the puritanical scrutiny of the theatre and women performers. Even the Queen was not above criticism, as William Prynne accused these women performers of placing themselves on display as objects of lascivious gazes. In his *Hystriomastix* of 1633, he condemned actresses as little more than whores.⁵⁶

“Understood in this way, antitheatrical asceticism appears to have been not simply an economic strategy for ordering a class of workers set in motion by the market but a cultural strategy for ordering a mass of meaning set in motion within the market.”⁵⁷ This prejudice thus established a rhetorical positioning for public women - those performing in the masks - as whores even before the first professional English actresses took to the stage at the end of the century.

⁵⁴ Sandra Richards, *The Rise of the English Actress* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1993), 1.

⁵⁵ The courtly women also performed roles in the plays and acted in the performances. Prynne's opinions on women in performance were expressed in his *Hystriomastix*. John Doran, *Annals of the English Stage, From Thomas Betterton to Edmund Kean, Volume I* (New York: AC Armstrong & Son, 1886), 50.

⁵⁶ Heidi Brayman Hackel, “‘Rowme’ of It's Own: Printed Drama in Early Libraries” in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 115. Prynne was punished severally for his criticism. He had part of both ears removed. His further criticism was punished with the removal of the rest of his ears and the letters LS branded in his face for seditious libeler.

⁵⁷ Agnew, 194.

Section 2: The Actress Emerged – The Marketplace and the Actress

“Elizabethan and Jacobean theater . . . did not just hold the mirror up to nature; it brought forth ‘another nature’ - a new world of ‘artificial persons’ - the features of which audience were just beginning to make out.”⁵⁸ Just as the audience began to be adjusted to this artificial world it was gone – closed for the masses for twenty years during the interregnum only to emerge during the Restoration, and quickly change faces again with the addition of actresses.

The Puritanical anti-theatrical prejudice was influential in closing of the theatres in 1642 during the Civil War. Ironically, it was similar ethical issues manipulated in the rhetoric of those supporting the theatres post interregnum that brought women to the public stage, arguing the inappropriateness of young boys dressing and acting like women on stage. With the introduction of women to the theatre Agnew argues “the traffic of women now seemed to intersect with the traffic in women.”⁵⁹ With the market economy, women’s sexuality could be bartered onstage as well as off. The concept of sexuality as a marketable commodity was strongly rooted in the Court of Charles II. In the highest levels off society the currency of sex could buy power and wealth even for those who would be unable to gain them through a prosperous marriage. This currency of sex and sexuality was different from the currency of romance or marriage, and a mistress could gain the wealth and power that may have otherwise alluded them. "The cosmological metaphor of the ‘theater of the world’ captured the scale if not the detail of England’s new map of commodity circulation, one where markets were no longer seen to

⁵⁸ Agnew, xi.

⁵⁹ Agnew, 12.

revolve around the periodic and cyclical needs of the commonwealth but were rather understood to generate permanent pressures and attractions of their own, around which the commonwealth now gravitated."⁶⁰

Joseph Roach argues that women onstage offered were an answer to a moral dilemma, "a deliberate act of policy in the name of the reformation of morals."⁶¹ Through the letters patent presented by Charles II in 1662, women would replace the impropriety of the boy actors through their performance of female roles on stage.⁶² Specifically the patent which gave women the right to perform the female roles and eliminated the boy actor stated, "the womens partes . . . have been acted by men in the habits of women *att which some have taken offence.*" Further the king gave permission for "*all the womens partes to bee Acted in either of the said two Companies for the time to come may be performed by women.*"⁶³

The Restoration actress sailed into previously uncharted territory. Female roles being performed by males were no longer allowed, yet the addition of women to the stage brought its own unanticipated set of moral dilemmas. The introduction of these women could strategically answer the Puritanical worries, that reopening the playhouses would be, with their cross-dressed boys, a "catalyst to unnatural vice," leading to immorality and other sins.⁶⁴ While it was found to be offensive for men to dress as women, when

⁶⁰ Agnew, 56.

⁶¹ Joseph Roach, "The Performance," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 31.

⁶² Joseph Roach, "The Performance," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, ed. Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 31.

⁶³ Judith Mihous, *Thomas Betterton and the Management of Lincoln's Inn Fields, 1695-1708* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), 6. The emphasis in the paragraph is mine.

⁶⁴ Joseph Roach, "The Performance," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre*, 31.

women reversed this role the theatre only exchanged one form of titillation and delight for another. “Fowle and undecent women now (and never till now) permitted to appear and to act, who inflaming severall young noblemen and gallants, became their misses, and to some their wives. . .”⁶⁵

Or as Colley Cibber stated:

The additional objects then of real, beautiful Women, could not but draw a proportion of new admirers to the theatre. We may imagine, too, that these actresses were not ill chosen when it is well known, that more than one of them had charms sufficient at their leisure hours, to calm and mollify the Cares of Empire.⁶⁶

The sudden awareness of the audience to the sexuality of having women performing the female roles on stage is further reflected in Pepys’ comments on a Theatre Royal performance of *Argalus and Parthenia* in 1661 “where a woman acted Parthenia and came afterward on the stage in man’s clothes and had the best legs that ever I saw; and I was well pleased with it.”⁶⁷ Note that he does not say he is pleased with her performance or her skill as a performer, but focuses on her sexuality as she performs the breeches role, gallivanting as a man onstage.

The advent of women onstage required the development of a new critical vocabulary to describe the impact of these women. A division emerged between “speaking women” - whores and harlots - and their opposite, “chaste women” - who were

⁶⁵ John Evelyn 1666 as quoted in Thomas A. King, “As if (she) Were Made on Purpose to Put the Whole World into Good Humor: Reconstructing the first English Actresses,” *The Drama Review* 36, no. 3 (1992), 93.

⁶⁶ Colley Cibber, *An Apology for His Life* (London, 1740), 55.

⁶⁷ Samuel Pepys, 1661.

silent and invisible within the private sphere of the home.⁶⁸ In this work I borrow the definition of “speaking women” from Lowenthal’s descriptions in *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage*.

The connection between speaking and wantonness was common to legal discourse and conduct books. . . The signs of the “harlot” are her linguistic “fullness” and her frequenting of public space. . . The [ideal wife], like Bakhtin’s classical body, rigidly “finished”: her signs are the enclosed body, the closed mouth, the locked house.⁶⁹

Restoration actresses placed themselves on display in a very public arena, the stage, and thus by definition, were ‘speaking women,’ or perhaps more aptly ‘public’ women. For the audience, the stage was a place in which the private became “public.” I suggest a definition that goes beyond merely “speaking,” since I would note that, for the Restoration actress, her role in the market and theatre went far beyond the lines she spoke onstage to entice her audience. Thus, “public women” is a more appropriate description of the actresses as they bridged the private and public sphere with their work. For these first actresses their private lives become part of their public image, reinforcing and strengthening their public persona, becoming part of their marketable commodity. She became “public” in its most literal sense: “exposed to general view, open, accessible to or shared by all.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* (United States: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 114.

⁶⁹ Peter Sallybrass, “Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed,” in Cynthia Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage* (United States: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 114.

⁷⁰ *Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary*, 10th Edition, <http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary>

Women were objectified not only “in the world of the play but also, by extension, in the world at large.”⁷¹ Lowenthal, suggests that it is “because they participated in an event that displayed their bodies’ onstage, this visual availability, so essential to their representations of characters, translated into a communal, extratheatrical discourse filled with speculations about the offstage activities of their bodies.”⁷² This discourse shaped the women’s identities merged both onstage and offstage personas into a marketable commodity. As Agnew has noted, the marketplace demanded that both the commodity and its seller be “bodied forth,” and this relationship between seller and object must be “deliberately displayed, performed and witnessed.”⁷³ The subject of love, sexuality and marriage are performed on the stage by the actresses and with them, their own personal lives are also on display. The actress becomes both a symbol of a new sexual phenomenon and champion of its power, and the theatre, the place where the women were displayed, was the marketplace in which the actresses sold their image to the audience.

As the actresses created their images on stage, off stage they faced still more difficulties as they struggled to establish a respectable place in the social structure of the period, a place to which they believed their newly created identities on the public stage entitled them.⁷⁴ Part of their difficulties arose from conflicting expectations - their own and the public’s. As single women of means, they assumed a certain measure of control

⁷¹ Ellen Donkin, “Mrs. Siddons Looks Back in Anger: Feminist Historiography for Eighteenth – Century British Theater,” in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle B. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 19945), 278.

⁷² Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage*, 137

⁷³ Agnew, 40.

⁷⁴ Lowenthal, 118.

over their lives and sexuality. Their audiences, however, saw them not only as sexually available, but perhaps more importantly, sexually vulnerable. It is this combination of sexuality and vulnerability that makes these women so intriguing.

The actress had to learn to balance, as well as embrace, both roles, on and off stage, in order to navigate the marketplace. Thus, the concept of 'actress' takes on a layered meaning of representation, "a body onstage (a visual phenomenon), the character she played (a representation in the minds of an audience), and an individual woman whose life in the real world came as part of the theatrical event (a verbal construct)."⁷⁵ While English culture had experience with both housewives and whores, it has no frame of reference into which it could situate a woman who publicly performed private roles as actresses did onstage. Almost by default the audience fell back on outdated definitions of public women, classifying these new 'speaking women', public women, as whores.

The audience often could not differentiate between characters with a risqué reputation and the actresses who portrayed them, but instead melded the two into one. Wilson in *All the Kings Ladies* argues that in "the small intimate theatrical world, it was difficult for an audience to separate the stage character of an actress from her real character . . . Ordinary playgoers might not protest, but there were certainly aware of the moral character of an actress, her past misdeeds and present liaisons, and they were quick to see any incongruity between the reality and the stage make-believe."⁷⁶ Thus, the actresses were judged not only on their ability to perform a role, but whether that role corresponded with the audiences opinions of the actresses' moral character. And further,

⁷⁵ Lowenthal, 114.

⁷⁶ Wilson, 105.

as Agnew has suggested, part of a successful market strategy involved the establishment of both authority and authenticity. While performing in the marketplace the actress needed to negotiate a complicated dance between the perceived impropriety of their public life on the stage and maintaining their honor offstage. The actresses 'reputation' was her 'market value' and this often depended on her image of propriety offstage. Although there are exceptions, for most actresses the image of propriety offstage was important in maintaining a profitable position with the theatres. Thus, actresses were forced to find a way to market themselves in public without necessarily condemning themselves as whores in their private lives. The actresses offered authenticity in presenting a real female body to audiences long accustomed to boys in female clothing. They claimed authority through their efforts to control their image in the public imagination as Restoration actresses.

Lowenthal argues that the Restoration audience found it easy to equate the actress with the prostitute: "her job demanded that she present her body, feign desire, and display this divided female identity; Her profession required that she regenerate, possess, and sell a series of provisional selves."⁷⁷ Arguably it is the very nature of the actresses' sexuality, their potential availability to men, which becomes central to their image and its creation on and off the stage.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Lowenthal, 114.

⁷⁸ Howe, 34.

Section 3: Prostitutes – Cue the Actress

Contemporary scholars' understanding of these women's lives is often gleaned from historical records that are anecdotal at best. In works such as John Doran's *Annals of the English Stage, From Thomas Betterton to Edmund Kean*, (1886) the author takes a folksy, gossipy tone to the history. Often for these early historians the story that is most interesting to tell may be hearsay and gossip. Gossip that was circulated in the period orally is written down either in memoirs or diaries which lends a certain validity to the information and subsequent historians take this "gossip" as fact. Historian Kristen Pullen in *Actresses and Whores* argues that "the shift from orality to print signals a shift in authenticity and validity. . . The existence of documents seems to logically lead to the existence of the event."⁷⁹

Restoration scholar John Harold Wilson suggests that of the 80 actresses in record books between 1660 and 1680, only two-dozen lived "respectable lives, thus establishing that in short, 'actress' and 'whore' were effectively synonymous."⁸⁰ Although an outlandish statement, contemporary studies of Restoration theatre often cite his work. As Pullen observes, "historical narratives build on each other, and every time an event is recorded and redocumented, it appears more true than the time before."⁸¹ Thus, what might seem like an outlandish statement gains credence through its continual repetition.

Works like Wilson's perpetuate the image of actress as prostitute and marginalize her importance in the theatre. According to Wilson, the actresses sold their virtue to the

⁷⁹ Pullen, 26.

⁸⁰ John Harold Wilson, *All the Kings Ladies* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 21.

⁸¹ Pullen, 26.

audience in performance in lieu of bartering it offstage in the streets. Yet, this link between the actress and whore has “been constructed historically through the repetition of anecdotal evidence.”⁸² The only agency Wilson grants the Restoration actress is the choice of locale for her prostitution.

Yet I suggest the narratives circulated about them helped to create an image that was a marketable commodity. In order to understand these narratives, it is important to define the terms prostitute and whore, terms that have been used interchangeably in histories of actresses. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines prostitute as a “woman who is devoted, or (usually) who offers her body to indiscriminate sexual intercourse, esp. for hire; a common harlot.”⁸³ The term whore is defined as, “an unchaste or lewd woman; a fornicatress or adulteress. to play the whore (of a woman), to commit fornication or adultery.”⁸⁴ Historian Pullen poses that “in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. . . definitions of prostitution are based on assumptions of morality and promiscuity as much as behavior: [actresses] were not prostitutes in a modern sense, though they were labeled ‘whores.’”⁸⁵ The main difference between the two definitions, is the exchange of money for sexual favors that is explicit in the first definition. Without a moral judgment or the illusion to promiscuity, the prostitutes were paid for a service rendered. The actress ‘whores’ in the seventeenth century were being condemned for their promiscuity, paid or unpaid. They may be kept women, but in general the actresses were not prostituting themselves in the marketplace, accepting payment for their

⁸² Pullen, 26.

⁸³ *Oxford English Dictionary*. <http://dictionary.oed.com> (accessed January 23, 2006)

⁸⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*. <http://dictionary.oed.com> (accessed April 26, 2006)

⁸⁵ Pullen, 44.

favors. The concept of labeling these women as prostitutes may be a modern reading of antiquated terms that were defined differently in the seventeenth century. Pullen poses that during the seventeenth century the term ‘whore’ did not carry the same connotations that it does now, and although still an insult, its connotation were “along the lines of the contemporary ‘bitch,’ designating an unruly woman rather than one who engaged in commercial sex.”⁸⁶ Further she suggests that the term during the period was defined as “a woman who converses unlawfully with men; a fornicator; an adulteress; a strumpet. . . in Restoration England, “whore” (as well as strumpet and harlot) seems to have designated a sexually free woman even more than a prostitute.”⁸⁷ Thus it appears that historians often use the terms and vernacular of the period, without transferring the meaning of the terms as well, in eliding the concepts of actresses and prostitute.⁸⁸

Section 4: Objectification and Fashion

While numerous actors such as Edward Kynaston, Charles Hart, and Cardell Goodman were all kept at one time or another by women, it was the female actress whose sexual exploits were regaled in the literature and satires of the period, further reinforcing the objectification which these women faced.⁸⁹ In the prologue for ‘The Session of Ladies’ (April 1688) the actresses Elizabeth Boutell, Elizabeth Cox, and Anne Barry are described thus:

There was Chestnut-maned Boutell, whom all the town fucks,
Lord Lumley’s cast player, the famed Mrs. Cox,

⁸⁶ Pullen, 23.

⁸⁷ Pullen, 23.

⁸⁸ Pullen, 23.

⁸⁹ Kynaston ironically was notable – in his early career as a boy actor – performing female roles. Pepys remarked he was “the loveliest lady that ever I saw . . . only her voice not very good.”

And Chaste Mrs. Barry, I'th'midst of a Flux
To make him a present of chancre and pox.⁹⁰

The women discussed above are not being evaluated for their acting talents but discussed as sexual objects. Each is critiqued for her sexual availability, whether because “all the town fucks” Boutell, or through the insinuation that everyone does Ms. Barry, thus she will be spreading “chancre and pox.” The implied availability of these actresses is implicit in giving the author license for the womens' objectification.

To further complicate the image of the actress as they took to the stage, fashions in dress and the decorative arts underwent a startling transformation with the return of Charles II in 1660. As the actresses emerged on stage the transformation in women's fashion was simultaneously revealing more of their bodies – torsos, arms and necks - than previously seen in the Puritan era. Woman's bodies were not concealed as fully as they were in the previous years. The styles changed from Puritan sobriety to French influenced splendor, with female body on full display, the object of male attention.

Sumptuous, luxurious fabrics for both men and women came into fashion, with low décolletage (i.e.: breasts very exposed) becoming the norm for courtly wear. And with the popular fashion of the period, with its elongated waist and corseted bodice pushing women's breasts upward “to bulge out above the almost horizontal oval of the neckline,” the fashion provided difficulties for a male acting a woman's part.⁹¹ Thus, simply from a practical point of view, young men could not perform female roles as believably in these new styles, where the bosom was so prominent.

⁹⁰ Howe, 35.

⁹¹ Geoffrey Squire, *Dress Art and Society 1560-1970* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), 94.

As many of the fashions began to be usurped by the actress, the middle class also acquired these styles, blurring the distinctions between the classes. If display of the body had previously been relegated to prostitutes, it became more and more challenging to tell ‘good’ from ‘bad’ women when even a middle class mother might wear a neckline that would have been considered shocking only a decade before.

Restoration women typically wore floor brushing gowns and petticoats, attire that fully covered their lower half, offering men the elusive occasional glimpse of their ankle or leg. This was in contrast to the figure of women in knee breeches and hose which presented a tantalizing image. Thus the breeches parts the women performed figured significantly in the objectification of the women. Pepys’ comments on the actresses legs on several occasions, and in his writings as well as various plays an understanding of what is valued can be found. Women’s legs should be “finely shap’ed, [with] very handsome legs and feet; and her gait, or walk, was free man-like, and modest, when in breeches”⁹² Elizabeth Boutel in *The Generous Enemies* (1671) spoke an epilogue that played up her legs in a pages costume to further titillate her audience.

As woman let me with the men prevail,
And with the ladies as I look like Male.
‘Tis worth your Money that such legs appear:

⁹² Aston II, 305 as quoted in Wilson, 76. Mountfourt in a prologue to D’Urfey’s *The Marriage-Hater Match’d* (1692) comments on Bracegirdle’s legs. The prologue states that Bracegirdle pretends to be ashamed of her appearance in Boys Clothing. That’s very strange, faith, since thy legs are straight:

for if thou hadst a thousand lovers here,
that very garb, as thou dost now appear,
takes more than any Manto we can buy,
Or wir’d Comode, tho Cocked Three Stories High.

Wilson 76. and Pepy comments on October 28 1661 on an actress in Argalus and Parthenia that the Theatre Royal, “where a woman acted Parthenia and came afterward on the stage in men’s clothes, and had the best legs that ever I saw, and I was very well pleased with it.” As well as on February 23, 1663 on Moll Davis with the Dukes Theatre “in boy’s apparel, she having very fine legs, only bends in the hams, as I perceive all women do.”

These are not to be seen so cheap elsewhere:
In short, commend this play, or by this light,
We will not sup with one of you tonight.

Not only does she play up the sexuality on display, but she alludes to the price men would pay a prostitute to see legs so fine as hers. Yet, Boutell states that the male audience needs be kind in their evaluation of her performance in the play, in order to have any chance of seeing the women's assets after the play. The emphasis on these breeches roles was definitely the actresses' beauty and youth the two attributes that were marketable commodities on the stage. These women lost the ability to draw in the audience with these parts as they aged and developed "thick legs and thighs, corpulent and large posteriors."⁹³

The costumes gave the male audience visual access to the actresses' bodies, giving the male audience members a glimpse of the delicacies to come if they ventured backstage to visit the tiring rooms. It was the implied sexual availability the audience read in the costumes, combined with the coquettish speeches that helped create an atmosphere of licentious sexuality, and easy prey.

Section 5: Marriage

The problem that an unmarried woman faced backstage could be very difficult, since an unmarried woman was often prey to unwanted sexual advances. Yet, the tradeoff for these women, one that included marriage and obedience, was not always desirable either. Advice manuals from the eighteenth century give a clear understanding of the

⁹³ Cibber, I, 167.

choices left for women during this period. Francisco Manuel de Mello in his work, *The Government of a Wife, or Wholsom and Pleasant Advice for Married Men in a Letter to a Friend*, clearly articulates the position of the husband and wife in a marriage contract. “Why is she his wife, if she will not obey?”⁹⁴ It was the woman’s job, her contractual responsibility to obey her husband once they were married. So the choices for a woman seem difficult - fight off the licentious advances on her own or be subject to her husband’s commands.

William Whately, in *A Bride-Bush or a Wedding Sermon*, clearly helps to elucidate just how much control the man has once a woman marries. “The man as Gods immediately officer, and the King in his Family: The woman as the deputies subordinate, and associate to him, but not altogether equal: and both in their order must governe.”⁹⁵ To question the custom and laws of marriage was to question society itself, its distribution of money, power and love. The eighteenth-century writer Mary Astell urged women toward the pursuit of higher ideals than being wives. She encouraged women to study and aspire to higher religious and moral ideals than that of being a wife. She urges the creation of a monastery of religious retirement where women could study and “expel that cloud of ignorance which custom has involv’d us in, to furnish our minds with a stock of solid and useful knowledge, that the souls of Women may no longer be the only unadorn’d and neglected things.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Francisco Manuel de Mello, *The Government of a Wife, or Wholsom and Pleasant Advice for Married Men in a Letter to a Friend* (London: Jacob Tonson and R. Knaplock, 1697), 6.

⁹⁵ William Whately, *A Bride-Bush or a Wedding Sermon* (London, 1624 New Jersey: Walter J. Johnson, Inc. 1976), 42.

⁹⁶ Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, 4th edition (London: Source Book Press, 1970), 7.

Francisco Manuel de Mello further illuminates further in his pamphlet what a man is to gain from the loss of his bachelor's freedom, and by contrast what a woman is to lose by entering a marriage contract. He is put into a better state of freedom, and is possessed of a woman who deposits in his hands, "her liberty, her will, her fortune, her care, her obedience, her life, and even her very soul. Who is there so blind, that weighing what he leaves, and what he receives, will not discover how great a gainer he is by the change?"⁹⁷

In *Some Reflections on Marriage*, Mary Astell states that marriage is little more than a business deal for men, with the wives the marketable commodity that is dealt between the husbands and the families. She argues that the only way for women to maintain their own 'worth' was to not place themselves on the market, they should study and learn higher religious ideals, not demean themselves to a commodity which men can transfer from one to another.

"For pray, what do men propose to themselves in marriage? What qualifications do they look after in a spouse? What will she bring is the first enquiry? How many acres? Or how much ready coin? Not that this is altogether an unnecessary question, for marriage without a competency, that is, not only a bare subsistence, but even a handsome and plentiful provision, according to the quality and circumstances of the parties, is no very comfortable condition."⁹⁸

Astell is not just critiquing the culture but she is identifying the problem and proclaiming radical solutions to the problem. She states that the answer does not lie in

⁹⁷ Francisco Manuel de Mello, *The Government of a Wife, or Wholsom and Pleasant Advice for Married Men in a Letter to a Friend* (London: Jacob Tonson and R. Knaplock, 1697), 6.

⁹⁸ Astell, "Some Reflections Upon Marriage," 1938.

trying to change the institution of marriage - the men have all the control in this area and would not allow change - but in not entering into the institution in the first place. Astell argued as well for the terms of marriage to be renegotiated. "The older view of the wife as chattel, bound by contract to a husband whom others had chosen for her and whom she was sworn to obey, was hotly debated and challenged."⁹⁹

Yet, Mary Astell, acknowledges the position that women must take once married to be subservient to her husband. Thus, in her work, *Some Reflections Upon Marriage*, Astell argues for women to strongly consider the consequences of marriage, and further that women should be guided by reason in choosing a mate, or in choosing not to marry. A strongly religious woman, Astell believed in the hierarchical order of society, and how it extended into marriage. Thus, once a woman was married, she became the subject/wife of her husband who was ultimately the subject of the king. She argues that although this hierarchy is important in political life, it is not important in private life, and the only way for women to circumvent this hierarchical chain is not to marry at all.

"Again, it may be said, if a wife's case be as it is here represented, it is not good for a woman to Marry, and so there's an end of human race.¹⁰⁰ The only other option is martyrdom to bring glory to God, and benefit to mankind: which consideration, indeed, may carry her through all difficulties, I know not what else can, and engage her to love him how proves perhaps so much worse than a brute, as to make this condition yet more grievous than it need to be."¹⁰¹

Astell believed that through education and understanding women would no longer have to be the victim of the marriage market, nor under the authority of men. In her work,

⁹⁹ Mary Astell, "Some Reflections Upon Marriage," in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* Fifth Edition, Volume I, General Editor, M.H. Abrams (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 1938.

¹⁰⁰ Astell, "Some Reflection Upon Marriage," 1941.

¹⁰¹ Astell, "Some Reflection Upon Marriage," 1938.

A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest, Mary Astell argues for women's rights to intellectual equality. "Let us learn to pride ourselves in something more excellent than the invention of a fashion, and not entertain such a degrading thought of our own worth, as to imagine that our souls were given us only for the service of our bodies, and that the best improvement we can make of these, is to attract the eyes of men."¹⁰²

The changing atmosphere toward women's rights in education and marriage also had an effect in changing the atmosphere surrounding the actresses' moral character. Through the different aspects of public life these women were achieving some control, navigating the new and evolving marketplace of the public sphere. Most of these actresses came from lower class families, working hard for their position, and most remained unmarried, thus guaranteeing themselves a modicum of control over contractual and financial matters in their careers as well as in their personal lives.

For many of the early eighteenth century actresses, if they achieved a successful career before marriage, tended not to risk losing control of their career by marrying later and remained single throughout. In *The Rise of the English Actress*, Sandra Richards argues that "the rising indispensability of the actress in theatrical life was fostering greater sexual equality."¹⁰³ Arguably, it is this sense of equality that these actresses began to achieve, that may have helped shape their ideas of marriage, leading many to remain single.

¹⁰² Mary Astell, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, 4th edition (London: Source Book Press, 1970), 3-4.

¹⁰³ Sandra Richards, *The Rise of the English Actress* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1993), 35.

For those women lucky enough to earn an independent income, the choice of marriage was not always an alluring one, a fact recognized in the plays from the period. Millamant in Congreve's *The Way of the World* declares if she is to marry "by degrees [she will] dwindle into a wife."¹⁰⁴ Dwindle appears to be the appropriate term for men gaining authority over their wives, "the wife being resolved that her place is the lower, and inferior. It little sootes to confess his authority in word, if she frame not to submission indeede."¹⁰⁵

The marriage views of the period can also be reflected in the playwriting of authors such as Behn, where consistently intelligent, alluring, faithful women would be coupled with "affable rogues who hurt and deceive them, suggesting that this unequal and burdensome pairing is simply the gendered way of the world."¹⁰⁶ In *The Rover*,¹⁰⁷ Helena is coupled with Willmore, a rogue willing to take by force what he can not beguile lawfully from a woman. Helena's faithfulness is rewarded by marriage and then ultimately, her untimely death. In *The Rover II* Helena's death at sea, a month after their marriage, is related. Willmore shows little sorrow at the loss of his bride, and has already burned through her fortune. The character who finally 'wins' Willmore in this sequel is La Nuche, who enters into a non-conventional relationship with Willmore, and does not marry. She does not place herself in the market for marriage, abandoning her own desires

¹⁰⁴ William Congreve, "The Way of the World" In *Restoration Plays*, ed. Robert G. Lawrence (London: J.M. Dent, 1994), 544.

¹⁰⁵ William Whately, *A Bride-Bush or a Wedding Sermon* (London, 1624. New Jersey: Walter J. Johnson, Inc. 1976), 37.

¹⁰⁶ Pat Gill, "Gender Sexuality and Marriage," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre* ed. Deborah Payne Fisk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 31.

¹⁰⁷ Aphra Behn, *The Rover*.

for his. La Nuche ultimately appears more his equal than Helena, and Behn does not punish her for immoral behavior, but appears to reward her for her choice not to marry.

Marriage was often damaging to the career of the actresses if she made a poor choice. The actress being bound to a husband would have to acquiesce to all his choices in her roles and careers, choices that could ruin her as in the cases of both Charlotte Charke and Susanna Cibber. Charke in the *Narrative of the Life of Mrs Charlotte Charke* (1755) Stated how when she was performing, "Seldom had the honour of his [Mr Charke's] Company but when Cash run low, and I as constantly supplied his Wants; and have got from my Father many an auxiliary guinea, I am certain, to purchase myself a new Pair of Horns." ¹⁰⁸

And further, although separated and estranged from her husband she could not claim her own earnings: "I was horribly puzzled for the means of securing my effect from the power of my husband's Right to make bold with anything that was mine, as there was no formal article of Separation between us." ¹⁰⁹ Finally she got around this difficulty by accepting her wages "in the name of a widowed gentlewoman who was boarding with her." ¹¹⁰

Susannah Cibber, much like Charke, would have been smart to heed the advice of Astell and not enter into the institution of marriage. Cibber had difficulty claiming her earnings once separated from her abusive husband Theophilus Cibber. While married, Cibber's husband forced her at gunpoint to have sex with their friend William Slopper to

¹⁰⁸ Charlotte Charke, *A Narrative of Her Life*, in Sandra Richards, *The Rise of the English Actress* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1993), 36.

¹⁰⁹ Charke, 36.

¹¹⁰ Richards, 36.

settle a debt, after which Cibber's husband sued her for adultery. Cibber was unable to even claim her own earnings when separated from her husband and he still controlled her career. Yet, it was a risky choice not to marry, for without the protection of a spouse, the actresses placed themselves in the perilous position of having to defend their reputations from lascivious advances.

However, for many of these women the payoff of not marrying could be substantial, for marriage meant a loss of control over all aspects of her career, she no longer could sign a contract, choose her company role, or even handle any of the funds she received: once married the husband was in control of such matters.¹¹¹ Much like the actresses, Barry, Bracegirdle and Mountfort who never married, often women would have more opportunities and more control over their own lives if they decided against the traditional norms of society and did not marry. By placing themselves in a new social stratus, one in which they had the control, and were no longer subservient to father or spouse, and free to make their own decisions.

Yet this freedom did not come without consequences. Tracey Davis argues, "Actresses enjoyed freedoms unknown to women of other socially sanctioned occupations, but in order to convince society that they were distinct from the demi - monde and to counteract negative judgments about their public existence, they endeavored to make the propriety of their private lives visible and accepted. This was not entirely successful. The conspicuousness of the actress at work and at home defiles the bourgeois separation of public and private spheres. The open door policy adopted by

¹¹¹ Katherine M. Rogers, *Feminism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 19.

some performers was wise in theory but paradoxical in effect: by providing proof of their respectable 'normalcy' actresses showed disregard for privacy, modesty, and self-abnegation. Either way, the bourgeoisie disapproved."¹¹²

Thus, while the actress may have been able to establish a sense of self-sufficiency and independence through her work as a performer, she would have a stigma placed on her by the upperclass. Men considered the actress fair game for their licentious advances and women scorned the actress for their manner of living.

Some of the early actresses remained completely independent - never publicly linking their names with a male protector. Others sought the benefit of male protection, becoming mistress of fellow actors or wealthy patrons - including the King - without the burden of matrimony. Though a sexual liaison offered money, benefits and often temporary protection, it came without legal entanglements and loss of legal rights. By remaining single actresses could choose to take a protector or not, to take a lover or not, but the choice was theirs to make and the actress could continue to maintain control of their career and their lives.

"What shall I say of those Wilful women, who will be positive and absolute in their opinions: these for the most part, are either very foolish or very proud. I cannot allow of arguing . . . for this is granting them an equality of judgment and authority, which must be carefully avoided. She must be made sensible; it is not her part to understand, but to obey, and to be lead, not to lead. Let her sometimes be put in mind, that having in marriage resigned her will to her husband, it is now a crime to make use of

¹¹² Davis, 69.

what is not her own."¹¹³ These early actresses seemed to have little choice if they wanted to remain independent and in control of their lives and careers, than not to submit themselves to the rule of a husband.

Section 6: Actresses and Their Earnings

The struggle for many actresses did not end with their choice to remain single but extended to all aspects of work and earnings. Feminist scholar Sue-Ellen Case states, “the few women who have entered the annals of early theatre history were usually privileged in some way: by class, by their beauty, by their association with men of influence, or perhaps because their work manifested some similarities with the works in the canon.”¹¹⁴ Thus, class issues played a vital role in the construction of actresses’ identities during the Restoration. Many of the actresses’ humble origins made them an easy target for criticism. The women were often from lower class families, working their way into the theatre through a variety of means - Nell Gwynne started as an orange girl and the Bettertons took in and raised an impoverished Anne Bracegirdle when her family could no longer keep her. Yet, in their professional lives the women portrayed all levels of society on the stage, dressing in the costume of the upperclass - raising their stature even to the height of royalty - blurring the lines between the classes and confounding the division between upper, middle, and the lower classes.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Francisco Manuel de Mello, *The Government of a Wife, or Wholsom and Pleasant Advice for Married Men in a Letter to a Friend* (London: Jacob Tonson and R. Knaplock, 1697), 32.

¹¹⁴ Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (Routledge: New York, 1988), 28.

¹¹⁵ The actresses could parade as the nobility, while at the same time the nobility was hiding their own identities behind masks, occasionally, as Lowenthal states, pretending to be of a lower class than they actually were. Thus the actresses cultivated the carriage and demeanor of nobles while the nobles played at

The role of an upperclass woman is a role most women of meager means would be unable to accomplish, for most girls with a low degree and no dowry would end up as a shopkeeper, barmaid, or in domestic service.¹¹⁶ During the 1670s the average working class woman who went into service as a maid in London could earn £3 10s a year and domestic workers saw only a minimal increase in pay until the 1740s when they could earn up to £5 a year.¹¹⁷ The women were also provided bed and board, as most domestics lived in with the families they served. With the price of a double occupancy room costing as much as £2 a year, and with the estimated value of bed and board for women as much as £9 15s a year, most women would never be able to subsist on a salary alone.¹¹⁸

Thus even with the low salaries for women, entering service was attractive for many young women when the overall cost of remuneration is considered, giving them considerable money for their purse that need not be spent for bed and board.¹¹⁹ The earnings of actresses were comparable to that of women in service with the lure of someday making much more money if they could attain star status. “Unlike the actors, however, actresses in both companies had no shares in the theatre, were little more than

being commoners, further complicating the pre-established roles of behavior. Lowenthal, *Performing Identities on the Restoration Stage*, 114.

¹¹⁶ Wilson, 42.

¹¹⁷ These earnings are based on the average sized household with only one or a few servants. Earnings in a large household would be greater, a waiting woman could earn up to £20 plus bed and board. Tim Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender 1660-1750* (England: Pearson Education limited, 2000), 188.

¹¹⁸ Tim Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender 1660-1750* (England: Pearson Education limited, 2000), 193.

¹¹⁹ Tim Meldrum, *Domestic Service and Gender 1660-1750* (England: Pearson Education limited, 2000), 198. By the mid eighteenth century women were making approximately £18 1s including their bed and board while milliners during this time were making £14 6s a significantly smaller amount and barely enough for them to subsist.

the property of the management, and were habitually underpaid in proportion to their ability to draw crowds.”¹²⁰

Women did not number significantly within the companies in the late Restoration, often outnumbered by men by at least two to one. The vast majority of actresses were also not able to accomplish a commodification of self - selling their image on in the marketplace - and so scraped out a meager existence.¹²¹ In the late 1600s an average

¹²⁰ Richards, 3.

¹²¹ The following statistics are pulled from *The London Stage 1660-1800 A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments and Afterpieces Together with Casts, Box Office – Receipts and Contemporary Comment Compiled from the Playbills, Newspapers and Theatrical Diaries of the Period, Part 1: 1600 – 1700* ed. by William Van Lennep With a critical intro by Emmett L. Avery and Arthur H. Scouten (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press Carbondale, 1965). The authors give the ratio of men to women in the two main companies by season.

59-60 Season

No women listed Rhodes Co. 14 men 5 of whom played women’s roles other companies were uncertain. Page 3.

60-61 Season

first season with the two main companies

Kings 15 men and 6 women

Dukes 22 men and 2 women, 16.

61-62 Season

Kings 22 men and 5 women

Dukes 18 men and 7 women, 53.

62-63 Season

Kings 20 men and 4 women

Dukes 28 men and 11 women, 53-54.

63-64

Kings 27 men and 9 women

Dukes 20 men and 5 women, 69-70.

64-65 Season

Kings 27 men and 9 women

Dukes 19 men and 6 women, 81.

65-66

closed for plague, 91.

young actress would make approximately 10s to 15s a week and often the young actresses' roomed together nearby the theatre. In comparison the top actresses were paid 40s to 50s. In contrast lesser known males could earn as much as £4 weekly.¹²² By 1694 Mrs. Barry, considered one of the finest English actress and one of the highest paid actresses of her time, was only paid 50s a week with a guaranteed £70 a year by the company manager from a benefit performance.¹²³ While a leading male such as Thomas Betterton was earning £5 weekly with a yearly present of 50 guineas. This does not include the profits from his benefit performance. Further, on a typical night a male shareholder might make as much as £5 14s, clearly a large discrepancy from the lowly wages of the female actresses.¹²⁴

Acting was not the most profitable career for women at this time. Other women had jobs more prosperous than acting could provide. Orange Moll - who held license to sell oranges, sweetmeats, lemon, and other fruit at the theatre - made £100 plus an additional 6s 8d each acting day or approximately an extra £66 a year to her income. She was paying the theatres as much each week to sell her wares as the actresses were

66-67

King 34 men and 16 women

Dukes 13 men and 5 women, 93.

92-93

United company 29 men and 15 women , 411.

93-94 Season

United 27 men and 14 women , 425.

¹²² Nicolle, *Restoration Drama*, IV, 369.

¹²³ Nicolle, 369.

¹²⁴ *The London Stage 1660-1800 A Calendar of Plays, Entertainments and Afterpieces Together with Casts, Box office – Receipts and Contemporary Comment Compiled from the Playbills, Newspapers and Theatrical Diaries of the Period, Part 1: 1600 – 1700* ed. by William Van Lennep, With a critical intro by Emmett L. Avery and Arthur H. Scouten (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), IV.

making. Ladies in Waiting during this period could earn £200 a year in the court of Charles II with their “traditional seven dishes at dinner and supper” supplied for them.¹²⁵ Historian Tim Hitchcock conjectures that for working women, actresses included, “from service to prostitution to beggary were two very short steps indeed.”¹²⁶

So although service was a respectable career for a young woman of meager means she was still as an unmarried woman in a precarious position in another’s household, and if she was not careful she could quickly descend into poverty and prostitution, a problem that the actresses faced as well. If they disgraced themselves, they could get released from employment at the theatre for as Colley Cibber states, “the Private character of an Actor will always more or less affect his publick performance.”¹²⁷

Actress Elizabeth Weaver provides a good example of the delicate balance an actress needed to keep between her onstage personality and her offstage performance of propriety. When her lover cast her aside ‘heavy with child,’ Weaver tried to reinstate herself in her previous acting company, a company she left to stay with her lover. Sir Robert Howard – a leading shareholder – responded that “Many women of quality have protested they will never come to thee house to see a woman actyng all parts of virtue in such a shameful condition . . . Truly, Sr! wee are willinge to bringe the stage to be a place of some credit, and not an infamous place for all persons of honour to avoid.”¹²⁸ After

¹²⁵ Seven dishes at dinner and supper meant that the women were given two meals a day seven days a week. This was significant because the other servants during this reign had all lost their rights to meals. Sonya Wynn., “‘The Brightest Glories of the British Sphere’: Women at the Court of Charles II,” in *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II*, Catherine Macleod and Julia Marciari Alexander (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2001), 41.

¹²⁶ Hitchcock, 92.

¹²⁷ Cibber, 250.

¹²⁸ Wilson, *All the King’s Ladies*, 19.

the birth of her child she was able to get reinstated with the acting company, however she did not play main roles any longer, forcing her deeper in debt. She continued appearing on the roles of the company in small parts until June 1665, when the theatre was closed for plague, after which she does not reappear. Yet what is interesting was there seemed to be no further complaints when she was reinstated after the birth of her child. It seemed it was the obvious signs of her promiscuity - her heaviness with child that upset the sensitivities of the audience, and not her sullied reputation.

Whether she died of the plague, or fell into poverty and prostitution is not clear. However Wilson holds her up as an example of how an actress's promiscuity will ultimately lead to her downfall. Weaver seemed to have slid off into oblivion. The tenuous balance of propriety and impropriety the actresses juggle became unbalanced by the woman's pregnancy and her lover's abandonment, forced her into poverty, beggary or worse. For as Hitchcock asserts, prostitutes were essentially just "beggars who added the allure of sex to the claims of Charity." With their call of "'My Noble Captain! Charmer! Love! My dear!' the language used by prostitutes seems more akin to the 'kind Christian Gentleman, wont you relieve my suffering' used by beggars than it does to any sexual chat-up line."¹²⁹ Thus, Hitchcock suggests with all their options used up and desperately poor, prostitutes were essentially using the only commodity left to gain a few pence for food and shelter.

¹²⁹ Hitchcock, 88.

Chapter 2: *Understanding the Portraits*

Though theatre historians have numerous contemporary accounts and scholarly speculations about the meaning of women's bodies in the public marketplace and the theatre, another tool to understand their visual impact on the social marketplace and their own ability to manipulate their images comes from a study of their representation in portraiture. It then becomes important to be able to understand the portraits' language and the cultural context of their creation. Who was the audience for the actresses' portraits, who were they being created for? People commissioned portraits for many reasons. A portrait may be commissioned to celebrate a wedding, or any number of important events in a person's life. Often the commissioners were male and they looked at these portraits as another possession for them to obtain.

"Like all languages that conceal as much as they reveal in their attempts at communication across time and space, the project of writing history - that is to say, the professional activity of looking into the past - cannot help but be construed as an act of inscription upon a darkened glass."¹³⁰ Understanding portraits then must be an act of reading that darkened glass, understanding the hidden narratives and attempting to decipher the language hidden in the portraits that the artist and sitter have left behind for the viewer. Richard Brilliant argues that "portraits reflect social realities. Their imagery combines the conventions of behavior and appearance appropriate to the members of a society at a particular time, as defined by categories of age, gender, race, physical beauty,

¹³⁰ Holly, 65.

occupation, social and civic status, and class.”¹³¹ In a synthetic study of portraiture the portraits reflect not just an image of the sitter, but require “some sensitivity to the social implications of its representational modes, to the documentary value of art works as aspects of social history, and to the subtle interaction between social and artistic conventions.”¹³² Thus the actresses’ portraits give us more than an image of the women, but an insight to the society in which they are created.

Portraiture presents a unique challenge for the viewer. Portraits not only give a visual representation of the person being presented, but also give the viewer a window into the style and culture of the period being depicted. Thus it is not enough to think of the portraits in terms of likeness, the portraits must also be considered for the signs demonstrated within them, signs that give us an understanding of the larger context in which the portrait can be understood.

The viewer has to understand the portraits within the context of the period in which they were created as well as enjoyed and displayed, so it is important to know where the portraits were displayed during the late seventeenth century, as much as deciphering the portraits themselves. Marcia Pointon argues it is not only the act of collecting portraits that helps to establish their importance, but the space of display and the arrangement of the images needs also to be considered to fully understand the significance of the portraits in a certain time or place.¹³³ Elizabeth Pomeroy in *Reading the Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* states, “A portrait is a fiction. This brief equation opens two interesting lines of inquiry for reading . . . portraits. The first line treats the

¹³¹ Brilliant, 11.

¹³² Brilliant, 11.

¹³³ Pointon, 13.

element of narrative, the second, of likeness.”¹³⁴ Both of these concepts are intricately entwined in portraiture and how portraits are interpreted. This chapter discusses both these lines of inquiry; the narratives created by the portraits through fashion, style and print culture, as well as the ‘likeness’ they represent.

Section 1: The Market Place and the Actress

Brilliant in *Portraiture* states that “there is great difficulty in thinking about pictures, even portraits by great artists, as art and not thinking about them primarily as something else, the person represented.”¹³⁵ Portraits historically are considered to depict a likeness of the figure they are portraying; however the “likeness” portrayed has not always been one of their physical aspects, but their essence as well. Thus reading actresses' portraits from the Restoration creates an interesting challenge. Julia Marciari Alexander in “*Beauties, Bawds and Bravura: The Critical History of Restoration Portraits of Women*,” argues that Restoration portraits of court women have historically been “alternately or concurrently cast as both damning evidence and illustrations of the supposed vice or virtue of the women they depict.”¹³⁶ Historians often equated the sexuality portrayed by the women in the paintings with the women’s moral character, as well as “an implied assessment of the work's aesthetic merit.”¹³⁷ In essence this claims

¹³⁴ Elizabeth Pomeroy, *Reading the Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (Connecticut: Archon Book, 1989), 31.

¹³⁵ Brilliant, 23.

¹³⁶ Julia Marciari Alexander, “Beauties, Bawds and Bravura: The Critical History of Restoration Portraits of Women,” in *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II*, Catherine Macleod and Julia Marciari Alexander (London: National Portrait Gallery 2001), 62.

¹³⁷ Alexander, “Beauties, Bawds and Bravura: The Critical History of Restoration Portraits of Women,” 62.

that the portraits can not have artistic merit if the subject depicted is of questionable morals.

The court beauties are described as "no longer beauties of the sunset but bawds who welcome oncoming night and its sport. They are voluptuousness exertions. Their eyelids drop, their bosoms are full and expansive, and their dresses reveal more than they should. These goddesses are celebrated neither for virtue nor chastity. For a moment beauty and sex are aligned in a triumph of unashamed sensuality."¹³⁸ The women are grouped together - no longer individuals in portraits – as a large group of women all with rampant sexual vices and loose morals. The historical writings on the Restorations' portraits of the "court beauties" can be equated with the literature concerning actresses of this period. What these examples portray is an elision of subject and object, and conflation of the aesthetic value of portraits or performances with moral judgments on the women's characters.

For centuries the experience of viewing portraits was said to be a means of viewing the person's soul.¹³⁹ Yet "likeness" as we understand the term to mean in the twenty-first century is not the same as it has been accepted throughout history, with the "degree of likeness required of a portrait . . . [varying] greatly, affected by changing views about what constitutes resemblance and whether it can ever be measured on an

¹³⁸ Roy Strong, *The Masque of Beauty*, exh.cat., National Portrait gallery, London, 1972, quoted in Julia Marciari Alexander, "Beauties, Bawds and Bravura: The Critical History of Restoration Portraits of Women," in *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II*, Catherine Macleod and Julia Marciari Alexander ed. (London: National Portrait Gallery 2001), 62.

¹³⁹ Julia Marciari Alexander, "Beauties, Bawds and Bravura: The Critical History of Restoration Portraits of Women," in *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II*, Catherine Macleod and Julia Marciari Alexander ed. (London: National Portrait Gallery 2001), 63.

objective basis.”¹⁴⁰ Genuine likeness to outward resemblances was not always the function of portraiture. The portrait did not have to be a true representation but rather “used to describe the relationship between the external appearance of a person and its apprehension by others: the mimetic equation.”¹⁴¹ The mimetic equation as defined here discusses how the portrait reflects the interior parts of the person and how they are to be understood by the viewer. By the Restoration the concept of likeness also encompassed the physical similarities between the subject and the object. Pepys’ in his diaries exemplifies this ideal for physical likeness in his declaration that the paintings of the famous court Beauties were “good, but not like,” a criticism that the famous eighteenth century portrait artist Peter Lely seemed to continually suffer under during his career.¹⁴²

Sir Peter Lely, when he had Painted the Dutchess of Cleveland’s picture, "he put something of Clevelands face as her Languishing Eyes into every one Picture, so that all his pictures had an Air one of another all the Eyes were Sleepy alike. So that Mr. Walker Ye. Painter swore Lilly’s Pictures was all Brothers & Sisters."¹⁴³ During the eighteenth century when the paintings were rendered, these sleepy eyes were recognized as representative of the style by which Lely painted his portraits. Later historians imposed their own meanings upon them, “psychological explanations based on our own,

¹⁴⁰ Brilliant, 26.

¹⁴¹ Norbert Schneider, *The Art of the Portrait: Masterpieces of European Portrait-Painting (1420-1670)* (Germany: Bededikt Taschen, 1994), 14.

¹⁴² Catharine Macleod, “ ‘Good, But not like:’ Peter Lely, Portrait Practice and the Creation of a Court Look” *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II*, Catherine Macleod and Julia Marciari Alexander (London: National Portrait Gallery 2001), 53. Pepys in this comment was stating how although he thought the paintings were good, they did represent the women in physical similarities. Lely was constantly criticized for a similarity in all his paintings around the eyes.

¹⁴³ Macleod, “ ‘Good, But not like:’ Peter Lely, Portrait Practice and the Creation of a Court Look,” 50.

emotionally-coloured perceptions,” as is often the case.¹⁴⁴ Art historians in subsequent centuries read these eyes as being sleepy and sexually languid. The sleepy sexuality was used to perpetuate the illusion of the loose moral character of the women portrayed. “[The]’ Beauties’ of Charles II.’s court, by Lely . . . look just like what they were – a set of kept-mistresses, painted, tawdry, showing off their theatrical or meretricious airs and graces, without one touch of real elegance or refinement, or one spark of sentiment to touch the heart.(1824)”¹⁴⁵

This is interesting criticism, considering not all the “Winsor beauties” were kept women or the King’s consorts. The most notably chaste ‘beauty’ was Frances Teresa Stuart, Duchess of Richmond renowned for her ability to remain chaste at court all the while being pursued by Charles II. “For it came to pass that she could not longer continue at Court without prostituting herself to the King, whom she had so long kept off, though he had liberty more then any other had, or he ought to have, as to dalliance.”¹⁴⁶ Representations of Frances Stuart in portraiture often reflect this status, presenting her as Diana the Virgin Goddess.

The criticisms of the “Winsor Beauties” were being voiced in the same period in which criticism of the actresses as loose women was being perpetuated through works such as the reprint of Oldy's *The History of the English Stage, From the Restoration to*

¹⁴⁴ Norbert Schneider, *The Art of the Portrait: Masterpieces of European Portrait-Painting (1420-1670)* (Germany: Bededikt Taschen, 1994), 12.

¹⁴⁵ P.P. Howe, ed. *The Complete Work of William Hazlitt*, (London: A.R.Waller and A. Glover, 1967), 38. As quoted in Julia Marciari Alexander, “Beauties, Bawds and Bravura: The Critical History of Restoration Portraits of Women,” in *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II*, Catherine Macleod and Julia Marciari Alexander (London: National Portrait Gallery 2001), 65.

¹⁴⁶ Pepys, Diary, VIII, 183 (26 April 1667) as quoted in Catherine Macleod and Julia Marciari Alexander *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II* (London: National Portrait Gallery 2001), 96.

the Present Time Including the Lives, Characters and Amours, of the Most Eminent Actors and Actresses. With Instructions for Private Speaking: Wherin the Action and Utterance of the Bar, Stage And Pulpit Are Distinctly Considered, 1741. The criticisms appear to reflect more on the views of morality and how it is portrayed in this period than the representations in portraiture of these women. The actresses are continually lumped as a whole as tawdry painted women, publicly displaying their wares; by painting their faces these actresses “lay on [their] own infamy, and lays aside [their] shame; she adds not youth or beauty, but wrongs her judgment, her age, and her countenance.”¹⁴⁷

Understanding of the function of portraits is further complicated by the examination of how portraits as signs name an object that becomes desirable as a means of symbolically owning the subject. For example, the portraits are representative of the person, and signify meaning to the audience. For as Roger Scruton states, “if we assume paintings, like words, to be signs, then portraits stand to their subjects in the same relation as proper names stand to the objects denoted by them.”¹⁴⁸ Often the power of a portrait maintains similar power to that of the subject signified by the sign of the portrait. Thus, a portrait of a King is honored and respected as the King himself. Because of the vicarious substitutive property of the portraits as they become representative of the actual subject, the possession of the portraits is often equated with the possession of the object.

Schnieder remarks “it has long been customary . . . well into the Enlightenment for likenesses of criminals who continued to elude the authorities’ grasp to be executed in

¹⁴⁷ Francisco Manuel De Mello, 172.

¹⁴⁸ Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetic Understanding: Essays in the Philosophy of Art and Culture* in Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (London: Reaktion Books, 1991), 26.

place of their real persons (executed in effigy).”¹⁴⁹ He further states that the law would stipulate that the paintings be “an accurate representation of the delinquent, and that the chastisement be applied symbolically to the picture as if to the parts of a real body.”¹⁵⁰

Thus the destruction of the painting symbolically destroyed the power the criminal. In a similar fashion the courtly “beauties” were collected by various wealthy or powerful men at court giving the owners possession of part of these beautiful women.

In 1666 Samuel Pepys commissioned a portrait of his wife:

After dinner I took coach and away to Hale’s, where my wife is sitting: and ended, her face and neck, which are now finished, do so please me, that I am not myself almost, nor was not all the night after, in writing of my letters, in consideration of the fine picture that I shall be maister of.¹⁵¹

The portrait of Pepys’ wife, was something he could feel proud of and claim and by extension present to a viewer the mastery over another possession his wife. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines master as “a person (predominantly, a man) having authority, direction or control over the action of another or others; a director, leader, chief, commander; a ruler, governor.”¹⁵² Master then, is an interesting choice of words when used to the ownership of a painting. To become master of a painting endows the painting with significance more than the just an object, but gives the painting the symbolic meaning, the painting takes on human significance, and becomes something that can be mastered. The portraits of the King also possessed a certain amount of power

¹⁴⁹ Norbert Schneider, *The Art of the Portrait: Masterpieces of European Portrait-Painting (1420-1670)* (Germany: Bededikt Taschen, 1994), 26.

¹⁵⁰ Norbert Schneider, *The Art of the Portrait: Masterpieces of European Portrait-Painting (1420-1670)* (Germany: Bededikt Taschen, 1994), 26.

¹⁵¹ Pepys, *Diary*, VII, (8 March 1666), 69.

¹⁵² *Oxford English Dictionary* <http://dictionary.oed.com> (accessed January 19, 2006)

when displayed. King's portraits were treated with the same respect as the King himself would be.

The likeness of the Sovereign. . . is usually displayed in the form of a raised half-length portrait between thee baldachin and chair of state in the audience chambers of his envoys. The painting represents the person as if he were actually there, for which reason those seated may not turn their backs towards him, nor may any person, ambassadors excepted, leave his head covered when entering a room in which the likeness of a ruling potentate hangs.(1733)¹⁵³

It was important then not only that the actresses were painted but that they were bought and sold as possessions. The women performed in the public sphere and there images were bartered and traded as a commodity that could easily be bought and sold in the marketplace. Thus the actresses could then be “possessed and mastered” by any person who could afford the price of the portrait. Often what these portraits did was represent characteristics of virtues or qualities that the sitter or commissioner would like to be associated with the woman, and these qualities would be attributed to her through the association in the portrait. Thus, due to the variance in styles and fashion in clothing depicted in the portraits fashion and clothing must be addressed to give a more complete understanding of the women represented. During this period the portraits were not just important as a visual representation of the sitter, portraits took on a greater role in society and culture. They offer a reminder of class status, power and ownership reflective of the late seventeenth century.

¹⁵³ Sedler, op.cit., col 1825, -Cf. also Adolf Reinle: *Das Stellvertretende Bildnis. Plastiken und Gemälde von der Antike bis ins 19. Jahrhundert.* Zurich/ Munich 1984. as quoted in Norbert Schneider, *The Art of the Portrait: Masterpieces of European Portrait-Painting (1420-1670)* (Germany: Bededikt Taschen, 1994), 26.

Section 2: Print Culture

With the developing popularity of print culture making images and literature more widely available, the emerging middle class began to own more luxury goods such as literature and portraits. In the late seventeenth century a new fashionable genre of collectable art – the Mezzotint became popular. Because prints – even the most expensive were still only a “fraction of the cost of a canvas; the cheapest were not beyond those of quite modest means.”¹⁵⁴ While commissioned portraits of a woman were for more private consumption, hung in a wealthy home for guests to see, a mezzotint would be readily available to anyone for a small fee, hanging in more public places. Thus, the ownership of images, once a status symbol only for the upperclass, began to be appropriated by the middle classes, with even the poorest “view[ing] them on tavern walls.”¹⁵⁵ The paintings and engravings were no longer just private works to be appreciated in private settings, but often were displayed in more public ways.

Print culture becomes important during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries because it expands the sphere of those who can own or even see art on a more regular basis. For it is not only the act of collecting portraits that helps to establish their importance, but one must also consider the space of display and the arrangement of the images to fully understand the significance of the portraits in a certain time or place. “The very fact of owning something – even if the objects owned are never to be seen by a

¹⁵⁴ Kevin Sharpe, “Restoration and Reconstitution: Politics, Society and Culture in the England of Charles II” in *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II*, Catherine Macleod and Julia Marciari Alexander (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2001), 21.

¹⁵⁵ Kevin Sharpe, “Restoration and Reconstitution: Politics, Society and Culture in the England of Charles II,” 21.

public- can serve powerfully to mythicize the owner.”¹⁵⁶ However, most often it is the visibility of an object that lends it importance. Thus, knowing when where and by whom the objects were seen and in what relationship to other artifacts gives a better understanding the historical meaning given to the objects. “The visibility of power is, however, highly complex and always relational. It is thus not only what is possessed that is significant but where and how it is made visible.”¹⁵⁷ Thus with having mezzotints making prints more assessable, even viewed in public areas such a pubs and coffee houses, it is no longer just for an elitist group. It is understanding how the pictures are displayed and what types of paintings and prints are on display that is very important during the eighteenth century.

Yet where were the paintings displayed? In *A History of Private Life, Passions of the Renaissance*, Chartier suggests some paintings were kept locked in cabinets by their owners or kept in studies in which the owner could surround himself with his books and art in privacy. The study was defined in Furetiere’s dictionary as “study: a place of retirement in ordinary homes where one can go to study or to find seclusion and where one keeps one’s most precious goods. A room that contains a library is also called a study.”¹⁵⁸ Although, originally a study was a cabinet that could be kept locked the study in the “early modern era architects created new private spaces in the homes of the well-to-do, or, rather, they increased the amount of private space transforming into rooms what

¹⁵⁶ Pointon, 13.

¹⁵⁷ Pointon, 13.

¹⁵⁸ Roger Chartier, Ed. Arthur Goldhammer, Translator, Philippe Aries and Georges Duby, General Ed. *A History of Private Life: Passions of the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 138.

had previously been mere objects of furniture.”¹⁵⁹ Furniture pieces such as cabinets, study, or writing desk may still refer to a piece of furniture, but it may also now refer to a room that is used for specific private purposes.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the study developed into a room or study in which the man of the house could retire to in private “or with a close friend, a son, or a nephew to discuss in confidence family business such as plans for marriage... some studies sheltered collections of coins, medals, stones, or enamels. A collector like Pepys could live in his study among portraits, medals, and engravings of illustrious men.”¹⁶¹ Yet some were too large to be kept away from all eyes in a cabinet, or even a ruelle, and so the more erotic of the portraits were often kept in a secret place that “no confessors or devout relatives was likely to see them. The fact that some small cabinets with doors and drawers are decorated with erotic paintings supports this hypothesis.”¹⁶² These cabinets would have been kept in the secret room away from general view.

As books became more affordable to a larger audience they also included albums in which the prints could be looked at and admired. In the seventeenth century many homes began to acquire bookcases as a “fixed item of furniture” and the more elaborate homes by the end of the seventeenth century would include libraries to display their

¹⁵⁹ Roger Chartier, Ed. Arthur Goldhammer, Translator, Philippe Aries and Georges Duby, General Ed. *A History of Private Life: Passions Of the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 210.

¹⁶⁰ Roger Chartier, Ed. Arthur Goldhammer, Translator, Philippe Aries and Georges Duby, General Ed. *A History of Private Life: Passions Of the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 211.

¹⁶¹ Roger Chartier, Ed. Arthur Goldhammer, Translator, Philippe Aries and Georges Duby, General Ed. *A History of Private Life: Passions Of the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 227.

¹⁶² Chartier, 252. The ruelle in the sixteenth and seventeenth century of France was the space “between the bed and the wall,” and it was “regarded as an especially intimate place.” 220.

books. These bookcases would be built-in and elaborate creating a significant display of wealth in the homes.¹⁶³

Originally the books would have been kept in cabinets, but these were eventually replaced by open shelves in which the spines of the books became as much a part of the display of wealth as the books themselves.¹⁶⁴ At the turn of the seventeenth century in Canterbury the inventories of “men’s estates indicate ownership of books in one out of ten cases in 1560, one out of four cases in 1580, one out of three cases in 1590, and nearly one out of two cases in 1620. Similar patterns can be noted in two smaller cities in Kent: Faversham and Maidstone.”¹⁶⁵ The ownership of books appears to depend on their professions and class level in society. Within the professions in Canterbury 90 percent held books, 73 percent of the nobles owned them, 45 percent of textiles artisans, 31 percent of construction workers, and 31 percent of the city’s yeomen.¹⁶⁶ Thus, although the professionals may have been more likely to own books, all classes showed an increase in amount of books owned. Unfortunately, these statistics show the books were owned, they do not indicate whether or not the books were actually read. What the acquisition of books and the creation of libraries does show, was an interest in acquiring and displaying wealth. The books were not always purchased to be read but with their

¹⁶³ Stephen Calloway and Elizabeth Cromley, ed. *The Elements of Style: A Practical Encyclopedia of Interior Architectural Details from 1485 to the Present* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 68.

¹⁶⁴ Stephen Calloway and Elizabeth Cromley, ed. *The Elements of Style: A Practical Encyclopedia of Interior Architectural Details from 1485 to the Present* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 68.

¹⁶⁵ Roger Chartier, Ed. Arthur Goldhammer, Translator, Philippe Aries and Georges Duby, General Ed. *A History of Private Life: Passions Of the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 129.

¹⁶⁶ Chartier, Ed. Arthur Goldhammer, Translator, Philippe Aries and Georges Duby, General Ed. *A History of Private Life: Passions Of the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 130.

impressive bindings the books create an impressive display in the newly created library rooms.

The profusion of printed materials in London created an appetite for visual materials as well, and actors and actresses were popular subjects. Often, the images being purchased were not posed portraits of the actresses, but ones in which the woman were depicted playing a role or costumed in "undress" specifically as "actress," further complicating their public image. Historian Kenny states "If oils were commissioned by the rich, engravings could be purchased by the less affluent, and they were marketed regularly. Not only were portraits of actors, actresses and playwrights popular, but more directly theatrical subjects were chosen as well."¹⁶⁷ Actresses' images became more widespread making them more publicly recognizable. Perhaps the best example of a "geographic collision" of these many phenomena appears in Covent Garden - famous as a theatre site, marketplace, and haunt of the city's boldest prostitutes. In and around Covent Gardens audiences could purchase engravings of actresses, solicit whores and enjoy the spectacle of the actress on stage. Small wonder that such a convergence of commodities and sexual intrigue would produce confusion. While actresses were not encouraged to participate in the public sphere through language - except in the form of pretty mouth pieces for playwrights or as the whorish 'speaking women' - they could exert some control over their visual image as they enter into the public sphere and the marketplace.

With the emerging marketplace economy portraits had become more accessible to a wider range of seventeenth century audience. A combination of the emerging

¹⁶⁷ Shirley Strum Kenny, "Theatre, Related Arts, and the Profit Motive," in *British Theatre and Other Arts, 1660-1800*. ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (Washington: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1984), 21.

marketplace and the creation of inexpensive better quality copies through mezzotints made portraits more accessible. The process of mezzotints was a new and highly guarded secret at the end of the sixteen hundreds. The process was invented by Ludwig Vonsiegen in 1642 and improved on by Prince Rupertin in 1654. It was not until the 1660s that the mezzotint was introduced to England.¹⁶⁸ Fabrics and gowns in the mezzotints have a fluidity and depth that couldn't be achieved with the traditional engraving methods. The realistic appearance of the engravings gave a sense of shadow and shadow and a smooth velvety surface that more closely resembled the portraits painted, and thus able to reflect a more lifelike image for the viewer to posses.

There were drawbacks to the new process. The engraving process that is used to make the plates is more delicate, and so it cannot be subjected to the repeated printings that a line engraving can withstand. For book publications it was very impractical, as it would be costly to have to remake the prints, but the quality of the prints made them desirable if more expensive than a traditional print. However, few men at this time knew how to make the mezzotints, with immigrants from the Netherlands and from France coming to England with the knowledge on how to create them and closely guarding their secret.¹⁶⁹ John Smith was considered the greatest native born British printmaker of the seventeenth century. An astute businessman, as well as a talented mezzotinter, Smith kept control of his own plates "refreshing them as they wore. He produced his prints in

¹⁶⁸ Antony Griffiths and Robert A. Gerard. *The Print in Stuart Britain 1603-1689*. (British Museum Press, 1998), 193.

¹⁶⁹ In 1672 Louis XIV invaded the Netherlands and so during this many artists were enticed to come to England. This included painters Van De Velde in 1672-3 and Jan Wyck and Abrahan Honius in 1674. Engravers Abraham Blooteling and his brother in law Gerard Bvalck in 1673. Antony Griffiths and Robert A. Gerard. *The Print in Stuart Britain 1603-1689* (British Museum Press, 1998), 217.

standard sizes, so that his customers might buy complete sets of his work to mount in albums, a number of which survive.”¹⁷⁰ He also hoarded the proofs he made, and sold them for high prices. Not all of the engravers maintained their own plates. The publisher Edward Cooper commissioned numerous plates from different engravers, among them Beckett, Smith and Williams. He would then maintain the rights to the plates for publishing.¹⁷¹

Painters were also becoming involved with the mezzotints. Booteling worked with Lely on a group of mezzotints he had produced. Henri Gascar, after arriving from France began to create mezzotints as well. Antony Griffiths and Robert Gerard in *The Print in Stuart Britain, 1603-1689* suggest that Henri Gascar’s popularity threatened to eclipse Lely’s through his use of mezzotints of his paintings for publicity, a means by which to sell his portraits. Griffith and Gerard suggest that it is the popularity of his mezzotints, those copied from his portraits, which helped to establish Gascar’s popularity. Gascar even used a French engraver of Dutch origins Peter Vandrebac, as Lely had done.¹⁷² Gascar did not rely only on an engraver but he even created and produced mezzotints after his own portraits.¹⁷³ Another important distinction of the mezzotints being produced is that they were not just engraving a head as most engravers did previously, but actually reproducing a portrait painting, paintings the artist had created themselves. Painters made a good living on their paintings during this period.

¹⁷⁰ Antony Griffiths and Robert A. Gerard, 240.

¹⁷¹ Antony Griffiths and Robert A. Gerard, 235.

¹⁷² Antony Griffiths and Robert A. Gerard, 217.

¹⁷³ Antony Griffiths and Robert A. Gerard, 218. Gascar had a series of ten extremely rare prints. It is hard to say whether he carved the actual plates or not, but they were definitely done under his direction. 220.

And the more successful painters often “seemed to have enjoyed a solid bourgeois prosperity, . . . Thomas Murray, who specialized in portraits of academics and clerics, accrued thereby a fortune estimated at £40,000 on his death in 1735.”¹⁷⁴ Thus for the painters to take on added work with engravers suggests that the engravings though low in cost to sell – often between 1 – 2 shillings - must make enough for it to be profitable for a notable painter to create their own plates.¹⁷⁵

Often the engravings of portraits are printed in reverse of the original painting, however, there are counterproofs that survive, and Griffiths and Gerard suggest that it is these surviving counterproofs that suggest the “explanation can only be that they were deliberately produced in order to reverse the mezzotints back to the same direction as the original painting a procedure that proves the intention to reproduce a work of art that existed in another medium rather than simply to produce a portrait.”¹⁷⁶ This suggests that there was a market for the painted portraits, as well as the mezzotints of the portraits that were a direct copy of the portraits, and not just an engraving of the portraits.

These portraits of Philida are an example of this reversal of prints. Although, at first glance the prints appear to be a mistake made by the book printers printing a negative of a print, they are two distinct portraits. The first is titled “The Celebrated Mrs. Clive, Late Miss Raftor in the Character of Philida sold by J. Faber at ye Golden Head in

¹⁷⁴ Ralph Edwards and L.G.G. Ramsey, *The Connoisseur Period Guides to the Houses, Decoration, Furnishing & Chattels of the Classic Periods: The Early Georgian Period, 1714-1760* (London: The Connoisseur, 1963,) 59.

¹⁷⁵ John Chaloner Smith, BA, MRIA, M. Inst. C.E. *British Mezzotinto Portraits: Being a Descriptive Catalogue of these Engravings from the Introduction of the Art to the Early Part of the Present Century. Arranged According to the Engravers: The inscriptions given at Full Length: and the Variation of Stage Precisely Set Forth. In four parts* (London: Henry Sotheran & Co. 1884,) 295, 904.

¹⁷⁶ Antony Griffiths and Robert A. Gerard, 240.

Bloomsbury Square Holburn J Vaber Fecit 1734.” The second is titled “Mrs. Clive in the Character of Philida P. Van Bleech Jun. Pinx et Fecit 1735.” Thus, it can be inferred the Mezzotint sold well enough that a second plate needed to be made, as the fragile plates wear out, and that the print presumably brought in a significant amount of money, enough that Van Bleech not only did the painting but created the second plate as well.¹⁷⁷

On first examination the pictures appear to be just reversals of each other. Further examination of the prints shows other differences than just the reversal. Mrs. Clive's face in the second print seems to be more finely carved giving her a younger fresher appearance than in the first image. Mrs. Clive's face in the second mezzotint lacks some of the lines and shadows that are apparent in the first mezzotint, her eyes have more lines around them and the mouth has deeper grooves at its sides. The shepherd's face does not appear to be younger from one image to the other; he appears to have only been reversed. The smoothness does not seem to appear only in the shepherdess face however, it appears to carry over to the rest of the print as well. The 1735 version has an all over smoother softer feel than the earlier print, the contrast not as sharp and distinct.

Another example of the creation of multiple of prints can be seen in the following representation of David Garrick. The print that follows is the 17” print obtained from the Folger Library collection in *Garrickiana A Collection of Garrick Bills, Original MSS Memoranda, Printed Particulars, Autograph Letters and Portraits of Celebrated Performers from the First appearance of this Great Actor to his Demise 1741-1779*. The *Garrickiana* also includes several versions of this print all based around one image of

¹⁷⁷ Both of these images are from the Folger Shakespeare Library. *The Print in Stuart Britain 1603-1689*. Antony Griffiths with the Collaboration of Robert A Gerard. Published for the Trustee of the British Museum, (British Museum Press, 1998), 47

Garrick as Richard the third, but they are created by different engravers. The prints get progressively smaller from a full size 17” print to a small page size to a postcard print that appears to be cut from a book and this is not a mezzotint.¹⁷⁸ This suggests that the print was popular enough to be made by multiple engravers for multiple printings. Thus, the prints could be sold in various sizes that would be used for different displays; the prints could be hung on walls as well as placed in albums. The prints could then be sold to a wider customer base by the variations in size and price. Those who may not have been able to afford the larger prints may have been able to afford the smaller images.

Thus the actresses’ portraits were more easily attainable, and the audience could admire the women in the theatre and possess them in their own homes in print. Arguably then, it was important for the actresses to be painted. It helped them establish their importance in society; much the way the courtly beauties used their portraits to establish their power at court. To be painted gave the actresses some power and authority, as the paintings themselves were expensive to commission.

The actresses and actors were most likely popular as print subjects because the same public that patronized the theatres was also the same public that was purchasing the portraits. Thus the audience was well versed in the theatrical language of the stage and the performers acting. Much of the knowledge historians have of the backstage complications, come from Pepys’ diaries and other writings of the period. However, Pepys was not the only person to record the backstage performances of the actresses, nor was print the only medium. As the developments of print culture continue to make a

¹⁷⁸ *Garrickiana A Collection of Garrick Bills, Original MSS Memoranda, Printed Particulars, Autograph Letters and Portraits of Celebrated Performers from the First appearance of this Great Actor to his Demise 1741-1779*, Folger Library. 14,15,17

wider variety of material available to the masses, a new style of painting began to develop. This led to the popularization of a new style of painting known as the conversation piece.

The famous Hogarth was known for his "conversation pieces" during his career. The term "conversation piece" was first used in the *Spectator* to describe "a painting, small-scaled in size and informal in mood that shows two or more persons in a state of dramatic or psychological relation to each other."¹⁷⁹ It was the easier access to mezzotints that helped popularize this style of art, making it available to a large body of viewers. No longer did a would be art owner have to commission a large painting in order to own a piece of art. For a much lesser price he or she could purchase a mezzotint.

Hogarth was a master of the conversation piece, working to create theatrical settings on canvas, in the way theatre practitioners did on the stage. "I wished to compose pictures on canvas, similar to representation on the stage. . . I have endeavored to treat my subjects as a dramatic writer: my picture is my stage and men women my players, who by means of certain actions and gestures, are to exhibit a dumb show."¹⁸⁰ The audiences that would be consuming these paintings was predominately the same as the theatre going audiences and so would already be trained to respond to the staged qualities represented in the paintings. Theatre Historian Shirley Strum Kenny suggests that the

¹⁷⁹ Robert Halsband "Stage Drama as a Source for Pictorial and Plastic Arts." *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660-1800* Shirley Strum Kenny, ed. (New Jersey, London and Toronto: Associated University presses, 1984), 155 These works were not necessarily theatrical scenes but scenes that relate a dramatic scene to the audience . The audience could read the images from the action in the scenes, often given a hint by the title of the scenes such as *The Harlots Progress* by Hogarth.

¹⁸⁰ R.B. Beckett, *Hogarth* , in Robert Halsband "Stage Drama as a Source for Pictorial and Plastic Arts," *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660-1800*, Shirley Strum Kenny, ed. (New Jersey, London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1984), 155.

“theatrical genre became appropriate as a structure and metaphor for viewing English social and cultural life.”¹⁸¹ The audience devoured Hogarth’s theatrical prints such as *The Indian Emperor*, *The Beggar’s Opera*, *Henry the Eighth*, to name a few, as well as his offstage prints including *The Laughing Audience* and *Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn*.¹⁸²

Hogarth’s painting *Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn*, 1738 depicts not the standard playhouse, but a makeshift one for traveling performers. The picture is filled with the same atmosphere that Pepys clearly describes in his journals about his own backstage escapades. Hogarth captures in a visual context the essence of Pepys’ diary, depicting the realities of being a professional woman in the emerging marketplace economy.

In, *Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn*, the women are in all stages of undress, reading lines and preparing for their performances, while men wander in and the stage is set around them. Hogarth “thought of his pictures in terms of a stage representation – a succession of scenes, with lines spoken and gestures – rather than a book.”¹⁸³

The actress depicted in the center of the painting *Strolling Actresses Dressing in a Barn* looks flirtatiously at the viewer, posing in the backstage area, with her body on display. The viewer is invited into the scene by the actress gazing outward toward the ‘audience.’ Down front another actress prepares for her role absorbed in her work eyes

¹⁸¹ Kenny, “Theatre, Related Arts, and the Profit Motive: an Overview,” 22.

¹⁸² Kenny, “Theatre, Related Arts, and the Profit Motive: an Overview,” 21.

¹⁸³ Ronald Paulson, “*The Harlot’s Progress* and the Tradition of History Painting,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 1, in Shirley Strum Kenny “Theatre, Related Arts, and the Profit Motive: An Overview,” *British Theatre and the Other Arts, 1660-1800*, ed. Shirley Strum Kenny (New Jersey, London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1984), 22.

gazing upwards as if recalling the lines she is learning from the book she holds, obviously absorbed in her work and not noticing the action around her. The implication that she can read and study her lines is interesting, but not the focus of the painting. Instead the focus is the sexualized image of the actress in undress. The implication is that not only Hogarth's print, but the actresses' bodies are the commodities available for consumption.

By the end of the seventeenth century the viewers of the paintings, often the same audiences that attended the performances, were used to reading the portraits of women for the roles being portrayed. The seventeenth century audience was then prepared to read the portraits created of the actresses - in roles that they performed on stage - and these portraits could then further emphasize the "character" the actresses were attempting to create both on and off the stage lives.

Section 3: Fashion and Fashionable Dressing the Narrative

Fashion for men and women has always been of essence in society. ". . . The difference between a man of sense and a fop is that the fop values himself upon his dress, and the man of sense laughs at it, at the same time that he knows that he must not neglect it."¹⁸⁴ Fashion identifies a person of wealth and power as those able to dress in fashion and be fashionable. They could parade their wealth in their clothing for all to see.

During the Restoration the change in fashion for women, with the lowered necklines and protruding bustlines, made the women's bodies more visible. Women's bodies were becoming increasingly used as a commodity for exchange at the end of the

¹⁸⁴ Lord Chesterfield, *Letters to His Son*, 9 November 1745, in *Dress Art and Society 1560-1970*, Geoffrey Squire (London: Studio Vista, 1974), 13.

seventeenth century, in the marketplace, onstage, or in the visual images made more accessible by the expansion of readily available prints. Thus fashion and a discussion of fashionable dress fashion becomes important in understanding portraiture of women.

With the return of Charles II the English had began to take their fashionable cues from the King. The fashion in theatres also began to change with the return of Charles II, and although the English audience acquired some of the tastes of its French counterpart when Charles II returned from exile - most notably with the appearance of actresses - they did not follow all the fashionable trends from the continent. *The History of Costume* suggests that the French fashions may have been followed at first because “Charles, who was accepting money from Louis XIV, did not rush to offend his benefactor.”¹⁸⁵ In 1661, John Evelyn published a work *Tyrannus or the Mode*, in part to encourage the English to establish an indigenous style of dress. He no longer wanted the English fashion style to follow the French trends. By the end of the seventeenth century fashion began to reflect changes in architecture and culture, reflecting a move away from French trends in fashion and design. J. Macky in 1722 described the English as, “like the French but not so gaudy; they generally go plain but in the best cloths and stuffs and wear the best linen of any nation in the World; not but that they wear Embroideries and Laces on their Cloathes on Solemn Days but they do not make it their daily wear as the French

¹⁸⁵ Blanch Payne, Geitel Winakor and Jane Farrell-Beck, *The History of Costume: From Ancient Mesopotamia through the Twentieth Century*, Second Edition (New York: Harpers Collins Publishers 1992), 374.

do.”¹⁸⁶ Thus the English were moving away from the excessive frippery of the French to a more refined English aesthetic.

The trend to create a unique English sensibility was reflected in most aspects of the art world. Art Historian Geoffrey Squire argues, “while the full excesses of the Roman Baroque had been tamed in France, they had passed almost unheeded in England.”¹⁸⁷ The English did not revel in the excesses of the Baroque fashion as the French did and wanted their own unique style that was indigenous to England. In 1666 Charles II introduced a new ensemble of “coat over a vest or cassock ... the slim, short sleeved coat was worn over a long - sleeve vest and was accompanied by narrow, knee – length breeches.”¹⁸⁸ This long slim style, praised by both John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys is the prototype of the modern three piece suit.¹⁸⁹ “It makes me show long-waisted, and I think slender”¹⁹⁰

This long slim style worn by males in the late 1600s becomes reflected in the women’s clothing of this period as well. The general silhouette for gentry women during the late 1600s and early 1700s changed as the elongated bodices of the 1660s and 1670s slowly rose to a “natural” waistline. Although straight stiff bodices were still in vogue, skirts for fashionable women moved from floor-grazing, to long, sweeping trains, further lengthening a silhouette that had been artificially elongated by the use of high

¹⁸⁶ Ralph Edwards and L.G.G. Ramsey, *Connoisseur Period Guides to the Houses, Decoration, Furnishing & Chattels of the Classic Periods: The Early Georgian Period, 1714-1760* (London: The Connoisseur, 1963,) 128.

¹⁸⁷ Geoffrey Squire, *Dress Art and Society 1560-1970* (London: Studio Vista, 1974),120.

¹⁸⁸ Payne, Winakor and Farrell-Beck, *The History of Costume: From Ancient Mesopotamia through the Twentieth Century*, Second Edition (Harper Collins Publishers: New York, 1988), 375.

¹⁸⁹ Payne, Winakor and Farrell-Beck, 375.

¹⁹⁰ George Etheredge, *The Man of Mode*, 1676.

heeled shoes among the fashionable set.¹⁹¹ Low necklines were the fashion, with the more modest women filling them with lace and ruffle. Women's hair became less elaborate, pulled back in softer styles with curls that framed their faces, although by the end of the 1600s the hair became elongated, built high upon the heads in extremely elaborate coiffures, often with a lace cap on top, "which makes a woman's head the basis for a many-storied edifice, the order and structure of which vary according to her whims".¹⁹² This later style of hairdressing balanced the lines of the clothing by elongating the head to offset the extended lines of the body.

During the 1700s fashion continued to change and evolve. English dress changed dramatically in shape and style from the end of the seventeenth century to the first years of the eighteenth century. In 1715 with the publication of *Vitruvius Britannicus*, the English fashion in dress did not follow the dramatic Rococo style that France found fashionable. The English fashions continued to move away from the French fashions and toward a more definite English style of their own. The English fashions followed the more simplistic lines and decoration that was idealized in the architecture of Andrea Palladio, as reflected in the work of Inigo Jones.¹⁹³ *Vitruvius Britannicus* was a work celebrating the ideas of the first-century Roman Architect, and all his many later disciples, among whom Palladio and Jones were numbered, as well as the young designer Colen Campbell and his patron Lord Burlington. This work was pivotal in architecture of this period, and also began to be reflected in other aspects of art and even clothing and

¹⁹¹ Payne, Winakor, and Farrell-Beck, 371.

¹⁹² Payne, Winakor, and Farrell-Beck, 386. La Bruyere, *Characters*, 1688, translated by Jean Stewart in Squire, 95.

¹⁹³ Geoffrey Squire, *Dress Art and Society 1560-1970* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), 120.

fashion as England again began to look back toward their early mannerist roots to creating a “less artificial, less well mannered, more naturalistic and much darker world, than the dream-like ideal created by the French.”¹⁹⁴ The English Rococo was characteristically represented by a pastoral setting, a villa in the English countryside with country dress, which contrasted sharply with the French Rococo style of the salons and dressing gowns. Squire argues when the English were not on their extravagant country estates, they could be found in coffee-houses or clubs “both masculine preserves,” and further emphasized the difference culturally between England and the salon society of France.¹⁹⁵ “The salons were the center for intellectual artistic and political discussion,” and these salons were grouped around a central hostess.¹⁹⁶ Thus the soft flowing Mantua gowns appropriate for the female run salons, were not what became popular in the English society with its male dominated coffee-houses.

England did develop a unique Rococo style, one that can be recognized in the work of artist such as Hogarth and Gainsborough.¹⁹⁷ Their works reflect a darker and more naturalistic sensuality than the dream like quality created in the French Rococo.¹⁹⁸ The casual utilitarianism of country wear became the fashion for women in their country villas, reflecting what the peasants had been wearing for hundreds of years. Women began to favor the short Caraco by mid century. The Caraco was a short, jacket-like bodice, spreading into a hip-length skirt, and worn only with a short petticoat and

¹⁹⁴ Squire, 120.

¹⁹⁵ Squire, 120.

¹⁹⁶ Squire, 120.

¹⁹⁷ Geoffrey Squire, 109.

¹⁹⁸ Geoffrey Squire, 121.

apron. This mixed with, “plainer fabrics, and simple, straw, milk-maid hats give[ing] a slight touch of Arcadian delights”¹⁹⁹

Further emphasizing the difference in style between the two was the adoption of the Mantua for French court fashion toward the end of the seventeenth century. Costume historian Geoffrey Squire argues that the importance of the Mantua is not only because it precursors the relaxed expression of the Rococo style to come, but that it is the first outer garment (as opposed to underwear) that is made by a woman for women. “From about 1675, as the making of female clothing began to pass from the province of the tailor to that of the dressmaker, femininity became for the first time a very conscious attribute of dress.”²⁰⁰ Until this period all outerwear was carefully protected by the tailors and women were not allowed to create their own clothing. Yet, Mantuas, being dressing gowns, were not restricted. Thus, women began creating these as a type of outer garment, and were able to start creating their own gown. Originally the Mantau was a casual gown that fell full and flowing from the shoulders and could be worn without the extensive structuring underneath that the fashionable gowns of the period possessed. This did not mean however it was uncorseted. It was still worn over a corset and outer petticoat with a stomacher covering the corset.²⁰¹ It was originally adopted from the style of a house dress that was not worn in public, but being less structural and comfortable was worn during less formal times in the home. But during the Roccoco period this casual comfortable robe gained popularity in France. The large open skirt of the mantua “piled-

¹⁹⁹ Geoffrey Squire, 118.

²⁰⁰ Squire, 118.

²⁰¹ A stomacher is usually a lacy decorative piece of fabric that covers a corset when a gown has an open front.

up behind into a billowing, blousy bustle, increased the effect of casualness with which women moved into the new century.”²⁰² Thus, the informality that was reflected in English Rococo fashion was not the informality of the boudoir that was reflected in France. The French were rebelling against the restrictive control the Sun King had possessed in the fluidity of the Rococo, while the English in their King Charles did not have this rigidity to react against.

The comfort of this French style became popular in as well in England, where female seamstress as opposed to male tailors began to shape and evolve this style of dress. As the Mantua evolved it looked less like a housedress, becoming more structured so that the drape of the attached skirt reflected the style of the fashionable dresses of the century before. Yet, the mantua was easier for women to wear, replacing the various overskirts and bodices with one piece. As it evolved it became more fitted, no longer cut from a single strip of fabric, and its elaborate drapes needed the assistance of a servant or friend to accomplish the elaborate folds. For as Swift describes, “How naturally do you apply you hands to each other’s lappets, ruffles and mantuas.”²⁰³ The women needed to fluff, and preen and arrange the elaborate folds.

Although similar in cut, the aristocrats’ dresses of satin and silk contrasted sharply with those of the working women, even though the last of the Sumptuary Laws regulating the dress in England was canceled after Charles I’s execution in 1648.²⁰⁴ In

²⁰² Geoffrey Squire, 108.

²⁰³ Jonathan Swift, in *Dr Johnson’s Dictionary*, in *Defining Dress: Dress As Object, Meaning And Identity*, ed. Amy de la Haye and Elizabeth Wilson (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 103.

²⁰⁴ Payne, Winakor, and Farrell-Beck. 340. Charles I was alarmed at the ease with which the lower classes were able to copy the simple silk garments being worn at court and so passed the last English sumptuary

general, during the late seventeenth century, working women wore plain bodices and skirts of wool. The styles of the lower class women's gowns were simpler than those of the aristocrats, plain fabrics lacking the embroidery and ornamentation of the aristocrats. This wasn't the only difference, by the mid 1660's the cut of the court gown was set far off the shoulders restricting the women's movement to such an extent that "women in their apparel [were] so pent up by the straitness' and stiffness of the Gown-Shoulder-Sleeves, that they could not so much as Scratch their heads . . . nor elevate their arms scarcely. . ." ²⁰⁵ Since working women needed freedom of movement to perform their daily tasks, these elaborate fashions would not serve them. The bodices were usually plain, set low on the shoulders with loose sleeves falling to the elbow. ²⁰⁶ Yet the bodices lacked the extensive boning that was incorporated in the gowns restricting the women's movement as well. Although the bodice curved in at the waist it did not do so as tightly as the aristocratic gowns, again, to give the women more ease of motion when performing their daily tasks. ²⁰⁷ The skirts were generally of dark wool, and pleated loosely at the waist, falling to the ankle, not to the floor - so as not to hamper labor or to drag in the mud and dirt. A chemise was generally worn under the bodice, covering the breast and shoulders and showing at the elbow. Shoes were of sturdy leather without the elegant heels that would have only encumbered the women's work.

The style and dress of the actress falls into an interesting void between the decorative dress of the aristocrat and the practical attire of the laborer. In many ways, the

laws in 1643 that restricted women of the lower classes from wearing the expensive silks and satins as well as certain colors in which the royalty dressed.

²⁰⁵ La Bruyere, *Characters*, in Squire, 94.

²⁰⁶ Payne, Winakor, and Farrell-Beck, 381.

²⁰⁷ Payne, Winakor, and Farrell-Beck, 381.

actress' body and cultural position had to bridge that gap by simultaneously embodying the decorative and the functional. Thomas Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus* (1831) states "The first purpose of clothes was not warmth or decency – but ornament. . ." ²⁰⁸ For actresses striving to create a marketable identity in the evolving marketplace; this is an intriguing notion to consider. These women did not necessarily need the clothes primarily for warmth as a laborer might, but used the clothes as a sign of status, a status the upperclass women resented them claiming. Thus their fashionable dress needs to be considered as both "an aesthetic experience, and as an essential expression of that generalized personality which emerges from a period." ²⁰⁹ Clothing does not only reflect the person who wore it, but is part of a larger ideal that is established during any period. The actress was not a member of the nobility, nor did she hold a position of rank in society, and yet the actress wore clothing that identified her with the nobility while on stage, and with her money, often dressed in fashions of a higher class outside the theatre as well. Marcia Pointon argues that "The acquisition, retention and organization of material goods are indicators of a family's economic status and a measure of their social position but the values transmitted via property are less easy to grasp than the issue of material wealth." ²¹⁰ Dress and appearance expressed social status in a tangible, easy to grasp way, thus Restoration actresses could manipulate fashionable silhouettes and fabrics for her own purposes. She could promote an appearance of wealth and class she did not actually possess. Yet it was not only the popular fashions that became popular for

²⁰⁸ Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* as Quoted in Geoffrey Squire, *Dress Art and Society 1560-1970* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), 13.

²⁰⁹ Squire, 9.

²¹⁰ Pointon, 13.

portraits. In the seventeenth century a new style of portrait was gaining prominence; one that would shape and change the look and style of portraiture for the next century.

Section 4: Portraits Undressed

How does fashion reflect on portraiture? How is fashion uniquely linked to the understanding of portraiture? Portraiture during the early part of the seventeenth century went through a transition that set the standards for aristocratic painting at the end of the seventeenth century. To better understand eighteenth century portraits, it is important to consider the construction of the portraits. Were there particular portrait schools that were creating portraits during the eighteenth century? Who was commissioning the portraits and who was the audience for them? What were the popular styles of dress being used in the portraits? This section addresses these questions and explains the two main theories that will be used to discuss the actresses' portraits.

In an exploration of actresses' portraiture it is not enough to study the popular fashion, as the actresses were often painted in "fancy dress" - specific costumed roles - as well as "themselves." The concept of fancy dress was not new to the Rococo period. From the early seventeenth century fancy dress had been increasingly popular in portraiture. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "Fancy Dress" as "A Costume arranged according to the wearer's fancy, usually representing some fictitious or historical character."²¹¹ While Emilie E.S. Gordenker in *Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641)* defines fancy dress as "the act of dressing up in one's fancy, a costume which may or

²¹¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary online.*

may not actually exist otherwise, but which in any case differs from the attire than is ordinarily worn.”²¹² Although often exotic, fancy dress can be historical, foreign, or even sheer fantasy. Fancy dress in portraiture in the forms of Portrait Historie - in which the roles taken on often include Grecian Robes - and the Pastoral Portraits where idyllic Arcadian shepherdesses are pictured, were a fashion since the beginning of the seventeenth century.²¹³ It was fashionable during the Restoration for a sitter to take “some form of disguise or allegorical role . . . a marked feature of many female portraits of this and earlier periods, particularly at the French and Dutch courts where many Restoration Courtiers were exiled during the Interregnum.”²¹⁴ The fancy dress fashion in portraiture of the eighteenth century in England looked back toward mannerism with a sense of romanticism and incorporated this idealism in the fashion and portraits of the eighteenth century.

There were several popular portrait artists throughout the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century that set a standard style for the portraits being produced. One prominent portrait artist who changed and influenced portrait painting for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was the artist Anthony Van Dyck. In 1632 he was appointed “Principal Painter in Ordinary to their Majesties by King Charles I.”²¹⁵ It was during his

²¹² Emilie E.S. Gordenker, *Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641)* (Belgium: Brepols Publishers n.v., 2001), 41.

²¹³ Portrait Histories are portraits in which the person portrayed is playing the role of a person in mythology or history. Pastoral portraits have the sitter playing a shepherd or shepherdess in an idealized setting of Arcadia.

²¹⁴ Diana Dethloff, “Portraiture and Concepts of Beauty in Restoration Painting,” in *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II*, Catherine Macleod and Julia Marciari Alexander (London: National Portrait Gallery 2001), 24.

²¹⁵ Gordenker, 9.

reign as the court painter that Van Dyck developed the style that would become so influential.

While in England, Van Dyck painted a series of portraits of aristocrats including Charles I and his wife. Charles ruled over a large court interested in theatre and art, and he himself was amassing a large and important collection of art.²¹⁶ It was here in Charles' court that he developed a “costume onto which viewers could project their own ideals and set of experiences.”²¹⁷ Instead of painting the women of the court in contemporary courtly wear, he developed a new style of portraiture. Van Dyck created a style of painting that in the next century would become more the norm for portrait artists. The dress was marked by his characteristic undress of the subjects being painted. Costume historian Diana De Marly defines “undress “as the wearing of Attire less formal than that expected in public, such as a dressing gown or déshabille.”²¹⁸ And undoubtedly enticing to the male viewer, as Pepys illustrates:

And at last, late, did pray her [his mistress] to undress into her nightgown, that I might see how to have her picture drawn carelessly for she is mighty proud of that conceit, and I would walk without in the street till she had done.²¹⁹

The undress consisted of a loose fitting robe with no decoration around the neckline, a detail that made his portraits markedly different from others in this period; it was the absence of the collar that also alluded to the undress – a casualness of the attire

²¹⁶ Gordenker, 9.

²¹⁷ Gordenker, 10.

²¹⁸ Diana De Marly in *Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641), And the Representation of Dress in Seventeenth-Century Portraiture*, Emilie E.S. Gordenker (Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2001), 52.

²¹⁹ Pepys December 20, 1665.

that was not expected to appear in public.²²⁰ The robes were a simple and graceful drape that gave a sense of timelessness to the portraits. “On mentioning the Roman Manner, I find that it signifies, a loose, airy Undress, somewhat favoring of the Mode, but in no wise, agreeing with the ancient Roman Habit”²²¹ The dress was similar in fashion to the Roman robes but was in actuality a newly created style.

Van Dyck’s new style of costume and his portraits were unique to those sitters of Charles Court and his courtiers. “At the Caroline Court, where he worked out and elaborated his innovations [on costumes], the dress could embody important concepts: it implied the inclusion in court society and the court’s taste: it captured Caroline ideals of feminine beauty . . . and it furnished an idealized setting that was remote from the bustle of the court.”²²² Several factors may have contributed to this style of costume were, for one, the enormous pressure Van Dyck was under to produce paintings, made the simple clothing and costumes easier to produce by assistants. Another reason this style of costume may have been adapted was that the sitters desired not to appear in out-of-date costume, so the sitters aspired to dress in a manner that would not go out of style.²²³ What resulted was a style that reflected in the aristocratic paintings of the seventeenth century and continued into the eighteenth century, appearing in “the works of Kneller, Largilliere, Francois de Troy and their followers until c.1750.”²²⁴ Roger de Piles Cours

²²⁰ Gordenker, 52.

²²¹ De Laiesse in Gordenker, 23.

²²² Gordenker, 10.

²²³ Costume historian Diana De Marly argues for the timelessness

lettering for the pastoral timelessness.

²²⁴ Emilie E.S. Gordenker, *Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641), and the Representation of Dress in Seventeenth-Century Portraiture* (Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2001), 77.

de Peinture (1908) states that fantasized costume had become a standard convention in portraiture. De Piles wrote:

At this time, most portraits are draped in a very odd manner; but whether this is proper, we shall here endeavor to examine. The partisans for this new kind of drapery allege, that the French modes being very changeable, portraits become ridiculous in five or six years after they are drawn; whereas the dresses that are made after the painter's fancy, always stand: that women's habits have ridiculous sleeves, which keep their arms locked up, in a manner that is very stiff, and neither favourable to nature nor painting: and that the custom which has prevailed, by little and little, of painting the draperies in this manner, ought to be no more formed in this particular, than in any other.²²⁵

Lely was another prominent court painter during the end of the seventeenth century. One of the most prominent portrait artist painting during the Restoration, he was appointed in 1661 as Charles II's official "Court Painter" and granted a pension of £200 a year. His style was marked by the use of the loose gowns and styles that Van Dyck had originated at the beginning of the century. "For they say, that we have the prints of Van Dyk (sic.), Lely, Kneller, and other for no reason that as fair examples: and just as Lely followed Van Dyk in graceful poses, and clothing, so we are free to follow him and other."²²⁶

Possibly one reason that other artists adopted this style was the large demand for portraits placed on the court painter. The painter was expected to paint the royal portraits but also "supply large numbers of copies, which could be distributed as gifts, and so help to make the features of the new monarch and his family widely know among his faithful

²²⁵ De Piles 1708, pp 282-283. English Translation: De Piles, Roger *Cours de Peinture part Principes*, paris 1708 *The Principles of Painting*. . . London, 1743, pp. 171-172. Gordenker, 23.

²²⁶ De Lairese 1707, II, p. 195. as quoted in Gordenker, 23.

subjects.”²²⁷ Thus, it was too much work for one painter to accomplish, and so art historians believe that given the quality of many of the copies made during this time they were done under his supervision if not with his help.²²⁸ Often the same faces or heads are used in several portraits with the pose being the only change, the faces and heads are unchanged, allowing the portraits to be turned out very quickly.

In 1707 Gerard De Lairese discussed fashions in portraiture stating , “. . . The sitter may be known by his Picture; which may be most agreeably done by mixing the fashion with what is Painter-Like; as the great Lely did, an which is called the painter-like or antique manner, but by the ignorant commonalty, The Roman Manner.”²²⁹ Thus it can be understood from his writing that, by this period the draping fashion in portraiture created by Van Dyck and adopted by Lely had become the standard, and it was used by the fashionable to help create a fashionable image.

Section 5: Portrait Reading

Throughout much of the twentieth century, portraits from the Restoration have been colored by the physiognomic readings of the portraits. Physiognomics is a “pseudo science” of face–reading in which the signs of a person’s character manifest themselves in the face, and with proper training a person could analyze the signs and read the

²²⁷ R. B. Beckett, *Lely* (Boston Book and Art Shop: Massachusetts), 14.

²²⁸ Beckett, 14. “When one of Pompeo Batoni’s Sitters, George Lucy, remarked: “I have shown my face and person . . . to take the likeness thereof, he is conceptualizing a split that was reproduced in actuality in portrait practice where the head ‘and particularly the face) would be executed by the master, whilst the body and clothing and the background were the responsibility of studio assistants.” Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth – Century England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 6.

²²⁹ De Lairese, Gerard, *Het Groot Schilderboek*, waar in de schilderkonst in al haar deelen grondig were onderweezen..., 2 volumes, English translation by J.F.Frisch, in Gordenker, 23.

character of the persons represented.²³⁰ Physiognomic portraits were popular in various periods throughout history and due to this popularity, portrait artist could also learn the “method and represent the signs as the basis of their interpretive characterizations.”²³¹ Often physiognomic signs give animal characteristics to the subject and they help to define the persons character through the type of animal they resemble. Through an understanding of the type of character the personality type of the person can be ascertained.

Because the formulas for reading and understanding these signs relies on the interpretation of “perceived - or preconceived – character evaluations and judgments of artistic taste, quality and style.”²³² In this type of sitting, the artist and the sitter - the subject-are attempting to portray the true nature of the sitter, and that above all else in the portraits, the artist, the sitter and the viewer are seeking to see a ‘true’ confirmation of the essence of the sitter’s character. Thus, physiognomic models, “largely den[y] women participation in the process of portraiture, treating physical ‘likeness’ as a transparent indicator of moral character.”²³³ At best a model such as this gives the beautiful women a means of establishing a metaphor for her beauty and grace, and at its worst “a negative assessments of artistic style and disdain for a woman’s reputation combine to deny both artist and sitter any merit.”²³⁴ Thus, if the viewer is to interpret Restoration actresses’ paintings by this method, and take the anecdotal material available of their lives as

²³⁰ Brilliant, 38.

²³¹ Brilliant, 38.

²³² Alexander, 63.

²³³ Alexander, 63.

²³⁴ Alexander, 63.

‘truth’, the signs would intimate the majority of actresses from this period would be women of ill repute, an interpretation that was for years perpetuated.

The poses that were popular during the period are important in analyzing the portraits. Often poses were standard as were the costumes and would have meaning potentially lost on an uninformed modern audience. Thus it becomes essential in analyzing actresses portraits to understand whether they are dressed for a role they performed onstage, or were using the standard poses and undress of portraiture in creating their offstage image.

With mezzotints of famous actresses and courtly women becoming increasingly popular during the eighteenth century it is important to consider the monetary incentive involved in the creation of these paintings. Many of the portraits painted of actresses did not portray their “true self” but were costumed pieces depicting their famous roles. To do a physiognomic reading of the actresses’ portraits is not necessarily primary in understanding the function in the marketplace. The fact that so many have been copied various times in mezzotints by various artisans intimates that the paintings value is a transactionable one, that these women were coveted to be owned and possessed. Arguably, it is not their “true self” that the viewer wants to possess, but their beauty and power, which make the paintings so desirable. Through the mimetic value embedded in the portraits - by owning the portrait - the owner then possesses part of the woman’s beauty and power as well.

An alternative argument to the “Physiognomic Art History,” one that can be seen emerging in this burgeoning marketplace is a transactionable one.²³⁵ In a transactionable agreement system for a portrait, the artist and sitter seek not to represent the sitters “true internal self” but to create a persona for the sitter through the visual imagery be it real or imagined.²³⁶ The transaction between the subject – sitter – and the artist is based on an agreement in which the artist represent the subject in a pose or costumed in a manner they which to viewed by contemporaries and remembered for posterity. Ostensibly this is not to deny that the portrait could be representative or reflective of the sitters’ personality, but that if it was so it was because the artists and sitter intended it to be so.²³⁷

In this transactionable model it would be the actresses and the artists who could create and enact a portrait as a tool in establishing a creative self-presentation; a self presentation that not only the artist but the sitter participates in and creates. For some women at court this “self fashioning” became important for establishing and maintaining power. The actress Nell Gwynne appears to have created a series of personas for herself while at court progressing from the mistresses, to the goddess Venus and finally the mature mother; her visual image continually changing and evolving. It is this self-styling that easily lends itself to theatricality and the creation of identity for actresses onstage

²³⁵ The argument for a transactional art history is found further in Julia Marciari Alexander’s, “Beauties, Bawds and Bravura: The Critical History of Restoration Portraits of Women,” in *Painted Ladies: Women at the Court of Charles II*, Catherine Macleod and Julia Marciari Alexander (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2001), 63.

²³⁶ Alexander, “Beauties, Bawds and Bravura: The Critical History of Restoration Portraits of Women,” 63.

²³⁷ Alexander, “Beauties, Bawds and Bravura: The Critical History of Restoration Portraits of Women,” 63.

with the actresses arguably establishing and maintaining their popularity with the broader consuming public in a similar manner.

In many ways the transactional model of art history offers a history conducive to understanding the actresses' portraits. During the eighteenth century the actresses' portraits were often created with the women in popular roles they had portrayed. Thus the women were not necessarily portraying their true self, but one they had styled for a particular role or play. Thus whether they are the ones involved in the transaction, or the painting is commissioned by the theatre owner for publicity or an adoring patron, the image is created in a style to represent the role, not necessarily the actress's inner soul.

It is important to note that the fee to commission portraits during the late seventeenth century were beyond the reach of most daily players, ranging from £5 for a head to £10 for a portrait to the knees – an exuberant sum for the actresses.²³⁸ To have a fine portrait artist such as Lely did of Nell Gwynne did would cost upward of £15 for a head and £20 for a half length.²³⁹ By the 1700s it would cost 20 guineas for a head, 40 for a half-length and 70 guineas for a full length.²⁴⁰ “For the six *Marriage a la Mode* Pictures Hogarth received but £120, from which £24 must be deducted as the cost of the frames.”²⁴¹ The cost of these painting would be daunting for a working actress, so it begs

²³⁸ Beckett, 11.

²³⁹ Beckett states that in the years between 1671 and 1674 Lely increased his prices again to £20 and £30 respectively “on the occasion of doing several pictures for the French Ambassador and the Duchess of Cleveland.” R. B. Beckett, *Lely* (Boston Book and Art Shop: Massachusetts), 21.

²⁴⁰ Ralph Edwards and L.G.G. Ramsey, *The Connoisseur Period Guides to the Houses, Decoration, Furnishing & Chattels of the Classic Periods: The Early Georgian Period, 1714-1760* (London: The Connoisseur, 1963,) 59.

²⁴¹ Ralph Edwards and L.G.G. Ramsey, *The Connoisseur Period Guides to the Houses, Decoration, Furnishing & Chattels of the Classic Periods: The Early Georgian Period, 1714-1760* (London: The Connoisseur, 1963,) 59.

the questions of who was commissioning the paintings. If the actress was not commissioning the painting this transactionable model would be further complicated as it would include the artist, the actress as well as the person commissioning the painting, creating a more complicated understanding of the transactionable model.

Many of the commissions for actresses' portraits have been lost, so it is difficult to prove that the actresses requested or paid for the portraits themselves. Yet, it is still important to analyze them as they give some understanding as to how the actresses were portrayed during the period, by the consideration of the styles of poses and the costuming in which they are portrayed. The next chapter will consider two prominent actresses of the late seventeenth century, and how the portraits affected by the market place economy as well as the popular writings about them helped to shape the image of the actresses in England.

Chapter 3: *Case Studies in Virgins and Whores - Bracegirdle Vs. Gwynne*

Samuel Pepys' diaries, as well as the theatrical prologues and epilogues of the Restoration describe the fluid boundaries between on-and off-stage worlds, in the pursuit and conquest of female virtue, with the portraits "painting" an ideal picture of the women. "Portraits exist at the interface between art and social life and the pressure to conform to social norms enters into their composition because both the artist and the subject are enmeshed in the value system of their society."²⁴² It is this interesting intersection that I will be exploring in this chapter.

In this chapter I will explore the process of creative self-invention of Anne Bracegirdle and Nell Gwynne, tracing their skillful manipulation of portraiture, dramatic texts and artistic conventions of the period. These actresses culled a range of possible female identities from literary and societal representations synthesizing them into a marketable commodity.

This chapter will be divided into two parts - biographies of the actresses, followed by a discussion of their portraits that can only make sense when viewed in the context of their biographies. But first, before the portraits can be discussed, one must also define the intended audience and the social context for creating such work. Art Historian Mieke Bal

²⁴² Brilliant, 11.

notes “nothing about art is innocent: It is neither inevitable, nor without consequences.”²⁴³

Anne Bracegirdle and Nell Gwynne represent polar opposites in the legacies they left for theatre historians, legacies that potentially influenced the way in which Restoration actresses’ careers and personal lives are remembered. Michael Ann Holly argues that “Cultural historians who use works of art as their entry into an age have visible evidence of the way the period they are chronicling once gave formal shape and structure to disparate ideas, sentiments, people, facts, and fictions. The historical narrative of essential unity of the time it is attempting to portray.”²⁴⁴

I believe that these roles - the virgin/whore dichotomy as exemplified by Gwynne and Bracegirdle - disguise the wide range of roles portrayed by actresses during the early seventeenth century, often presenting the two opposites with nothing in between. By identifying the binaries first, I would suggest it will help to illuminate the breadth in between still left to uncover.

Section 1: The Women

Bracegirdle’s “creativity” as a performer lay in her talent for fusing her stage and personal identity, so that audiences, having seen her play the virtuous maiden onstage, linked that image with her off-stage personality. I will trace Bracegirdle’s efforts to use the theatre as both a defense against public slander, and as an effective marketplace in which she could sell the “eternal virgin.”

²⁴³ Mieke Bal, *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 5.

²⁴⁴ Holly, 65.

Early on in her career, Bracegirdle appeared to embody Francisco Manuel de Mello's definition of an ideal woman as outlined *The Government of a Wife, or Wholsom and Pleasant Advice for Married Men in a Letter to a Friend* (1697): "That a woman be not high-spirited, nor Ambitious, but rather meek and patient; for there are two things most prejudicial to the female sex, too much tongue, and too little patience: hence it follows, that she who is silent will be respected by all men."²⁴⁵

Bracegirdle's seemingly meek persona and virginal performances makes her representative of the ideal woman discussed earlier, yet it is her lack of silence, her voice on stage, that makes her respected. The actresses had to walk a fine line between propriety of the silent woman, and impropriety of a speaking woman to work in their career. When actresses first took to the stage a "lady" would never consider acting as a career even if her family had fallen on hard times for "to get bread from the stage was look'd upon as an addition of new scandal to her former Dishour."²⁴⁶ Bracegirdle originated the roles of Millamont in *The Way of the World*, Selima in *Tamerlane*, and Angelica in *Love for Love*, among others, and was praised by her contemporaries as "the Diana of the stage," and "the darling of the theatre."²⁴⁷ Though one of the most prominent actresses of the English Restoration, Anne Bracegirdle's contemporary renown rests less on her reputed acting skills, than on her reputation for spotless virtue. She creatively commodified the image of the virgin in peril, and was so successful that contemporary historians continue to laud her ability to "rise above" the immorality that

²⁴⁵ Francisco Manuel de Mello, *The Government of a Wife, or Wholsom and Pleasant Advice for Married Men in a Letter to a Friend* (London: Jacob Tonson and R. Knaplock, 1697), 219.

²⁴⁶ Colley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber*, Vols. I, ed. R.W. Lowe. (1889), 75.

²⁴⁷ Edward Robbins, *Twelve Great Actresses* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900).

tainted the Restoration actress, as well as her ability to overcome the various sexual scandals that dogged her career.

Bracegirdle deliberately chose roles that promoted an image of respectability, but also ones that tantalized the audience with the spectacle of virtue under siege, whether as Desdemona or as Millamont.²⁴⁸ Thus, she played with the erotic possibilities of a virtuous woman menaced by a corrupt world; one who is eternally threatened, but never succumbs.

Bracegirdle also used her stage persona as an effective defense against the scandals that plagued her outside the theater. In 1692, her career was nearly destroyed by an aborted kidnap attempt in which a close friend, actor William Mountfort, was killed while rushing to her defense. After the incident, rumors suggested that Mountfort had been her lover, or that she had been complicit in the kidnapping plot.²⁴⁹ Bracegirdle fought these slurs by re-asserting her virtuous personal and stage identity. She reconstructed her image through her performance in D'Urfey's *The Richmond Heiress* (1693) a play centering on a series of abductions attempts upon the heroine, whose triumphs in the end are reinforced by the performance of her song, "I am a maid, I'm still of Vesta's train."²⁵⁰ She re-established the image of the virtuous woman; her stage image spoke for her, helping to reaffirm her position as a virginal victim. She sold her virtue to the audience in performance, in lieu of bartering it off-stage.

²⁴⁸ Burnim, Kahlman, Philip H. Highfil, Jr. and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand* (Illinois: southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 274.

²⁴⁹ John Doran, *Annals of the English Stage, From Thomas Betterton to Edmund Kean, Volume I* (New York: AC Armstong & Sons, 1886).

²⁵⁰ Burnim, Kahlman, Philip H. Highfil, Jr. and Edward A Langhans, 273.

“[upon her debut], [Bracegirdle] was just then blooming to her maturity: never any woman,” Writes Cibber, in his *Apology*, (1740) was in such general favour of her spectators, which, to the last scene of her dramatic life, she maintained by not being unguarded in her private character.

This discretion contributed not a little to make her the Cara, The Darling of the Theatre: for it will be no extravagant thing to say, scarce an audience saw her that were less than half of them lovers, without a suspected favorite among them. And though she might be said to have been the Universal Passion, and under the highest temptations, her constancy in resisting them served but to increase the number of her admirers.²⁵¹

Cibber intimates that it is her “guarded” private life that continues her success in her career, that specifically because of her discretion, she was able to achieve the professional status of “Darling of the stage.” By playing the seductive virgin she could continue to tempt her audience, teasing them along as admirers without ever accepting them as her lover. It was the anticipation of the chase, the teasing and tempting, the challenge of being perhaps the one who could possess her, and not necessarily her capture that made her so appealing.

When Bracegirdle retired from the stage at the age of forty-four, she received pensions from various male “benefactors,” among them Congreve and the Earl of Scarsdale.²⁵² The allowances enabled her to live in comfort for the next forty years. Whether she was sexually linked to either of these men remains a mystery. Her reputation for indestructible virtue protected her in an age when, for many, the word “actress” was

²⁵¹ Cibber *Apology* as quoted in *Twelve Great Actresses* (Edward Robins B.P. Putnam’s Sons New York and London: Knickerbocker Press 1900), 17.

²⁵² Burnim, Kahlman, Philip H. Highfil, Jr. and Edward A Langhans, 275.

synonymous with “prostitute,” and actresses were considered easy targets for any lecherous man to toy with as they dressed within the tiring houses. “‘Tis as hard a matter for a pretty woman to keep herself honest in a theatre, as ‘tis for an apothecary to keep his treacle from the flies in how weather; for every libertine in the audience will be buzzing about her honey-pot.”²⁵³ This passage shows that it was common knowledge that not only did the audience members wander freely backstage, but often expected that they would have free access to the actresses as well. Bracegirdle’s creation of virginity then, is an astonishing feat in an era when “working women... were treated as legitimate prey by licentious gentlemen.”²⁵⁴

The women often had little recourse either to answer the criticism of their critics, often the target of sardonic poems and plays, so they needed to continually reinforce their image in any way they could. Tom Brown’s play - *Amusements Serious and Comical, Calculated for the Meridian of London* (1700) - targets the backstage antics of the Restoration performers and plays. It also offers scathing commentary on some of the actresses of the period and his comic sketch reinforces the stereotype of actress as an available woman:

But tis the way of the world, to have an esteem for the fair sex, and she looks to a miracle when she is acting a part in one of his own plays... look upon him once more I say, if she goes to her shift, tis Ten to One but he follows her, not that I would say for never so much to take up her Smock: he Dines with her almost ev’ry day, yet Shes a Maid, he rides out with her, and visits her in Publick and Private, yet

²⁵³ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actress* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 33.

²⁵⁴ Katherine M. Rogers, *Feminism in Eighteenth – Century England* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 19.

She's a Maid; if I had not a particular respect for her, I
should go near to say he lies with her, yet She's a Maid.²⁵⁵

Brown wittily criticizes the popular actresses Anne Bracegirdle's public persona of Virginal purity, through a sardonic praise of her "virtuous nature," a nature that the audience is naturally to assume is false and misleading. Thus for a virtuous actress and Bracegirdle in particular, it was important to protect her reputation for a myriad of reasons. Her reputation for virtue had been carefully constructed in order for it to support the onstage persona, and her continued success as an actress. The prompter William Chetwood, relates a story in which

a virtuous actress, or one reputed so {Mrs. Bracegirdle},
repeating two lines in King Lear, at her exit in the third
Act,

Armd in my Virgin Innocence I'll fly,
My Royal father to relieve, or die,
Received a Plaudit from the Audience, more as a reward
for her reputable character, than, perhaps, her acting
claim'd. where a different Actress [Mrs. Barry] in the same
Part, more fam'd for her Stage Performance than the other,
at the words Virgin Innocence, has created a Horse-Laugh,
. . . and the scene of generous pity and Compassion at the
Close turn'd to Ridicule.²⁵⁶

The seventeenth century audience did not except easily an actor or actress they felt was playing against their constructed identity. If an actress was known for her promiscuity, then the audience often would find it difficult to believe her performance as a paragon of innocence, and the seventeenth century audience was verbal enough to make known their disapproval. Thus, it was important for Bracegirdle to continue her presentation of innocence in order to continue playing the roles she popularized with the audience, and

²⁵⁵ Tom Brown, *Amusements Serious and Comical, Calculated for the Meridian of London (1700)* in A. M. Nagler *A Source Book in Theatrical History* (New York: Dover Publication, Inc, 1959), 248-249.

²⁵⁶ Chetwood, W.R. *A General History of the Stage* (1749), 28.

for the audience to continue to accept her in the roles. Cibber reinforces this as well “the private character of an Actor will always more or less affect his Publick Performance. I have seen the most tender Sentiment of Love in Tragedy create Laughter, instead of Compassion, when it has been applicable to the real engagements of the Person that Utter’d it.”²⁵⁷ He states that the audiences were not accepting of the actors or actresses’ lives being in conflict with the roles they performed on stage, wanting both to reflect one another. Not all audience members reacted this way. In 1689 in an anonymous letter to A. H. Esq: Concerning the Stage argued that whether or not “ the actors are generally debauch’d and of lewd Conversation ... they are confin’d to the poet’s language... because we are not to consider what they are off the stage, but whom they represent: We are to do by them as in Religion we do by the Priest, mind what they say, and not what they do.”²⁵⁸ Yet it appears more the norm for the audience to want the onstage and off to coalesce.

Gwynne's career was at the opposite end of the spectrum from Anne Bracegirdle's. A natural comedian, she used her sexuality to enhance her comedic roles, as well as flaunting her 'wares' to the upper-class. She acquired various patrons over her short career, her most powerful acquisition being the King himself, the father of her two sons.

Gwynne also manipulated her theatrical audience as Bracegirdle did, but in contrast to Bracegirdle, she played upon her sex appeal and sexual indiscretions, using them to further her popularity and tantalize the male audience. Gwynne began her career

²⁵⁷ Coley Cibber, *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber*, Vols. 2 ed. R.W. Lowe. (1889), 250.

²⁵⁸ *A letter to A. H. Esq: Concerning the Stage* (1698) Augustan reprint No. 3 (1946), 12.

modestly, working as an orange girl at the “King’s Theatre, Bridges Street, where for eighteen months the constant repartee bandied between orange-girls and gallants sharpened her natural wit to rapier point.”²⁵⁹

At a young age Gwynne took to the stage, and gained a modicum of fame as a comedic actress. Illiterate, it was her sharp wit and intelligence that helped her memorize her parts. Most actresses were not judged successful in both comedic and dramatic roles and Gwynne was no different as Pepys notes, “After dinner with my Lord Bruncker and his mistress to the King’s playhouse, and there saw *The Indian Emperour*; where I find Nell come again, which I am glad of; but was most infinitely displeas’d with her being put to act the Emperour’s daughter; which is a great and serious part, which she do most basely.”²⁶⁰ But the direct charm of Nell Gwynn, who rose from the nothingness of a filthy back street to become the faithful mistress of Charles II, overwhelmed even this curious connoisseur of women.²⁶¹ Her rise to infamy was often played upon in the roles she portrayed exemplified in Dryden’s *An Evening’s Love: Or, The Mock Astrologer* in which Gwynne played Jacintha in 1668:

Wildblood: Then what is a gentleman to hope from you?

Jacintha: To be admitted to pass my time with while a better comes: to be the lowest step in my staircase, for a knight to mount upon him, and a lord upon him, and a marquis upon him, and a duke upon him, till I get as high as I can climb.²⁶²

²⁵⁹ Richards, 17.

²⁶⁰ <http://www.pepys.info/1667/1667aug.html>, accessed August 1, 2008.

²⁶¹ “Pretty and Witty Nell Gwynn” Ronald Hiborne Theatre Museum Archives Gwynne, Nell, 10.

²⁶² Dryden, *An Evenings Love: Or The Mock Astrologer*, 1668.

And indeed Nell did climb, from her early Lover Charles Hart to King Charles III, using her lovers as a staircase as well.

Gwynne developed a sense of style in her acting in which she was both funny and seductive on the stage which attracted the men to see her both on and off the stage.

Samuel Pepys describes meeting Gwynne in his diary, “Knipp took us all in—ie., to her box,” states Pepys “and brought us to Nelly—a most pretty woman, who acted the great part, Celia, to-day, and did it pretty well. I kissed her, and so did my wife, and a mighty pretty soul she is.” In ending his record of the days pleasures he notes again “specially kissing of Nell,” a great treat that he seemed to relish.²⁶³

His interest in Nell continued, “. . .So to the King's house: and there, going in, met with Knepp, and she took us up into the tiring-rooms: and to the women's shift, where Nell was dressing herself, and was all unready, and is very pretty, prettier than I thought.”²⁶⁴ Pepys does not mention Gwynne being disturbed by their meeting while she was undressed, suggesting to the modern reader that this was not an uncommon occurrence for the actresses.

Gwynne used her sexuality in her portraits as well, often allowing herself to be painted in nude and suggestive poses. In an 1721 account of Lely made by George Virtue describes the nude portrait of Gwynne as Venus “a telling impression of her continuing power to inspire: this picture was painted at the express command of King Charles II. Nay he came to Sr Peter Lillys [sic] house to see it painted. When she was naked on

²⁶³ Lord Braybrooke, ed. *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (London: Simkin, Marchall, Hamilton, Kent, nd. January 23, 1666)

²⁶⁴ Lord Braybrooke, ed. *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* (London: Simkin, Marchall, Hamilton, Kent, nd. Oct. 5, 1677)

purpose. Afterwards this picture was at Court. Where the Duke of Buckingham [copied] it from, (when King James went away) as many others did the like.”²⁶⁵

She remained popular with the audiences for her vivacious nature as well as her physical beauty, well after she had stopped performing, becoming the King's Mistress. The most popular anecdote retold about her, relates how her carriage was once stopped while traveling through Oxford by an angry mob of riotous peasants - who had mistaken her for The Duchess of Portsmouth, the King's other Catholic Mistress – “Pray good people, be civil – I am the Protestant whore!” After which the mob, realizing it was the amicable actress in the carriage and not the Duchess, allowed her to pass unharmed. This would be a difficult event to prove without firsthand testimonies, and yet proving this is not important. What is important is to understand the event in terms of how it works in the creation of Gwynne's identity. Rumor or not it is a widely circulated legend and remembered and retold by historians as truth. In examining the story, the event is interesting as well for Nell's own complicity in the event to identify herself as a whore. She tells the crowd in the various versions that she is not the mistress they want but “the protestant whore” identifying herself with wit and humor as the King's whore. Gwynne is not embarrassed by her status but embraces it and uses it to her own advantage to extricate herself from a potentially risky situation. This is important, because it reinforces the image that is being circulated about her. She was not trying to create a virginal ideal for herself, but embracing the free spirited woman she portrayed on and off stage.

²⁶⁵ *Biographical Dictionary, Vol. VI*, 470 – 1. The account quoted was written by George Virtue in 1721 and quoted in Sandra Richards, *The Rise of the English Actress* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1933), 23.

With her quick wit and humor, she continually amused the King. She knew she did not have the same social standing as the other mistresses, being of a lower class, but her intelligence and humor elevated her above most others. Her greatest rival was the Duchess of Portsmouth. A contemporary account in verse (1682) entitled ‘a Dialogue Between the Duchess of Portsmouth and Madam Gwyn at Parting’

The People’s hate, much less their curse, I fear
I do them justice with less sums a year.
I neither run in court nor city’s score,
I pay my debts, distribute to the poor.²⁶⁶

This account portrays how public the women’s rivalry was, and Gwynne was often sided with. Gwynne was no Catholic, which was unpopular during the late seventeenth century, and is noted for her kindness and giving to the poor. The rivalry is further documented in a letter dated September 11, 1675 by Mme De Sevigne to her daughter.

[the Duchess of Portsmouth] did not foresee that she should find a young actress in her way, whom the king dotes on. . . The actress is as haughty as Mademoiselle; She insults her, she makes grimaces at her, she attacks her, and boasts whenever he gives her the preference. . . . “This Lady,” says she ‘pretends to be a person of Quality . . . Why does she demean herself to be a courtesan? She ought to die with shame. As for me, it is my profession. I do not pretend to be anything Better.’²⁶⁷

The rivalry was said to be made worse between the two women by the taunting and insults that Gwynne made toward the Duchess of Portsmouth. Again, Gwynne was said to have used her wit to align herself with a courtesan – a whore. Her self-deprecating

²⁶⁶ Cunningham, 116-117.

²⁶⁷ Cunningham, 119.

humor points out that the duchess is no better than herself they are both just the King's whores. There are two portraits of the women "one of the duchess of Portsmouth and the other, a rare Gascar print of Nell in the same posture and wearing an identical see through chemise," which Gwynne in an attempt to outdo her rival supposedly filched the chemise in order to procure her rival's spot with the king for an evening.²⁶⁸

Although an interesting anecdote, that Gwynne could possibly have duped the King and changed places with her rival, the authenticity of the anecdote could be severely questioned. If the story is based on the two images in identical negligee it is tenuous at best. Although possible she was painted in the negligee for this reason, it was often the practice for painters to "paint female sitters in the same type of nightgown, which varied only in small details."²⁶⁹ Lely in 1662-65 painted a series of portraits known as the "Winsor Beauties" for Anne Hude, Duchess of York who wanted "pictures of the most beautiful women at court."²⁷⁰

The loose shift is apparent in several of these women's portraits. And as discussed earlier the "undressed style" was popular for the aristocracy during the late seventeenth century. When Kneller was commissioned in 1690-91 by Mary II to produce for Hampton Court a series of his own court beauties, reminiscent of Lely's, the garments remained distinctly

²⁶⁸ Sandra Richards, *The Rise of the English Actress* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1993), 21.

²⁶⁹ Emilie E.S. Gordenker, *Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641), And the Representation of Dress in Seventeenth-Century Portraiture* (Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2001), 73.

²⁷⁰ Emilie E.S. Gordenker, 73.

unchanged.²⁷¹ So, although it makes for a fun and racy story, it appears that it was created more to further the gossip surrounding the rivalry of the mistresses.

Gwynne heard that the Duchesses of Portsmouth's son was given a title she continually referred to her son fathered by the king as "the bastard." The King reprimanded her to which she responded that she was calling her son by his title, a title the King promptly revised, giving him the title Baron of Headington and Earl of Burford. Even after Charles' death he cared for Gwynne, appealing to his brother James to ensure that his little Nell would be taken care of. Nell herself brazenly pressed her own interest at court, when she spoke of the King not only as a lover but an intimate friend.

He told me before he died that the world should see by what he did for me that he had both love and value for me. . . . He was my friend, and allowed me to tell him all my grief's, and did, like a friend, advise me and told me who was my friend and who was not.²⁷²

Section 2: The Beauty and the Beautiful

There are contemporary accounts of both of these actresses, which I have explored and critiqued, however I would argue that the portraits and paintings give yet another view of these women. These portraits were carefully controlled and constructed to create a specific image of the actresses. Through the exploration of the actresses' portraits, I am trying to use visual representation to understand the culture that enabled them to be created.

²⁷¹ Emilie E.S. Gordenker, 73.

²⁷² John Harold Wilson, *Nell Gwyn: Royal Mistress* (London, 1952), 242.

Neither Gwynne nor Bracegirdle was the quintessential ideal of beauty during the Restoration. Thomas King, in his article “*As If (She) Were Made On Purpose To Put The Whole World Into Good Humour*”: *Reconstructing The First English Actresses*, proposes that the actresses were categorized and given their physical significance according to the “popular science of Physiognomy,” (which I have discussed earlier).²⁷³ Barry, Betterton, Boutell, Gwynne, and Bracegirdle all were described as middle-sized or smaller and with the exception of Gwynne they all had dark or black hair, Gwynne's being “Bronze-red [but] sun-kissed with streaks of gold.”²⁷⁴ Bracegirdle had dark eyes and Bracegirdle, Barry, and Gwynne all had dark eyebrows. Bracegirdle was described by Colley Cibber as having “no greater claim to Beauty, than what the most desirable Brunette might pretend to,” with dark eyes and dark brows.²⁷⁵ Nell was described as “a vivacious plump little woman, red-haired, with a pair of twinkling blue eyes which almost disappeared when she laughed, a round beautiful face and a slightly upturned nose. Nell could dance and sing with much gusto and excelled in comedy roles.”²⁷⁶ Although both were considered as attractive, they did not typify the ideal beauty of the period, “who was tall, slender, fair, and blue eyed.”²⁷⁷ Even into the twentieth century Gwynne’s biographies attribute part of her allure to the contrast of her dark brows with her light hair, hair

²⁷³ Thomas A. King, “As if (she) Where Made on Purpose to Put the Whole World into Good Humor: Reconstructing the first English Actresses,” *The Drama Review* 36, no. 3 (1992), 95.

²⁷⁴ King culls his data from the descriptions cited in Wilson’s work on Restoration actress. Gwynnes description is from Arthur Irwin Dascent. *Nell Gwynne, 1650-1687: Her Life Story From St.. Giles’s To St. James’s* (London: MacMillan and Co., Limited, 1924), 79-80.

²⁷⁵ *Colley Cibber An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber*, Ed. B.R.S. Fone (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan press, 1940), 97.

²⁷⁶ The Magazine Programme. “The Stage of the Past, Being Episode in the lives of Actors and Actresses of other Days. No. 10. – Nell Gwynne, 1642 – 1691”

²⁷⁷ Thomas A. King, “As if (she) Where Made on Purpose to Put the Whole World into Good Humor: Reconstructing the first English Actresses,” *The Drama Review* 36, no. 3 (1992), 94.

described as “unusually light for a girl of plebian origin.”²⁷⁸ The differences between Gwynne’s physical attributes and the ideal beauty represented by the upper-class mistresses can be clearly understood when comparing her descriptions with those of her two rivals Barbara Palmer [Countess of Castlemaine and Duchess of Cleveland], and Frances Stuart [Duchess of Richmond and Lennox].

Barbara [Palmer, Countess of Castlemaine and Duchess of Cleveland] was tall, supple, fair, blue-eyed, and so beautiful that many observers considered her the “finest” woman in England in her time. Frances [Stuart, Duchess of Richmond and Lennox] was so beautiful that John Rotier, the famous engraver, used her as a model for Britannia on the King’s new copper coins. She was tall, slender, graceful and fair-haired, with large eyes and a little Roman nose.²⁷⁹

The ideal beauty during the late seventeenth century was the cool tall elegance that these blonde beauties exuded.²⁸⁰ Yet these charmers, Gwynne and Bracegirdle, reigned on the Restoration stage, with dark attractive looks and the plumpness that courtiers found so sensually enticing in contrast to the austere blonde, aristocratic look. Yet, even given Bracegirdle’s working class origins and sensual looks, she was able to manipulate her image in order to transform herself into an icon of chastity.

I suggest that to sustain her image as a virtuous woman Bracegirdle appropriated aristocratic fashions and manners, combining them with her working class heritage and non-aristocratic features to create an entirely new look. Gwynne had arguably used her lower class background to help advertise her sexuality, displaying herself in portraiture in

²⁷⁸ Thomas A. King, “As if (she) Where Made on Purpose to Put the Whole World into Good Humor: Reconstructing the first English Actresses,” *The Drama Review* 36, no. 3 (1992), 95.

²⁷⁹ Wilson, *Nell Gwyn, Royal Mistress* (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1952), 21-22, 38.

²⁸⁰ It did not mean that there were no dark courtly beauties, but the ideal for the upper-class woman was the tall, slender, blonde woman represented here.

suggestive poses with hair loose and untamed (much the same as her early orange girl day's descriptions). This style spoke also to the upperclass portraits of undress. Only those with power and money could appear in public – such as in a painting – in such a state of *deshabille* as she did in this portrait. It gives her a place of power that the women in the court were also striving for appearing this way.

The deliberate manipulation of Bracegirdle and Gwynne's images in portraits and behavior on stage and off, coincided with the growing seventeenth and eighteenth century conviction that the attributes of gentility could be acquired like any other desirable commodity. Etiquette books, such as *Rudiments of Genteel Behavior*, 1737, stressed that anyone could learn genteel deportment, by following the instructions and visual images provided and more importantly, they could attain the agreeable features by incorporating certain movements into the deportment of the entire body. It was through proper deportment, through the physical sphere of the body, that the individual could change her deportment, which in turn would be an opening to social success.²⁸¹ “By the signs that both Sexes hand out, you may know their Qualities or Occupations, and not mistake in making your Addresses.”²⁸² Actresses understood the importance of creating a genteel image on stage and could adopt the concept of proper deportment. This theory is echoed in Ritchies' *Treatise on Hair* 1720 which claims that:

Women study dress only to add to their beauty; whereas men should dress suitable to their various ranks in life, whether as a magistrate, statesman, warrior, man of pleasure, &c. For the hair, either natural or artificial, may be dress'd to produce in us different ideas of the qualities of men, which may be seen by actors, who alter their dress according to the different characters they are to perform.²⁸³

²⁸¹ Pointon, 92.

²⁸² Pointon, 92.

²⁸³ Pointon, 92.

During the Restoration, women dressed to enhance their own attributes, emphasizing their natural beauty, while men dressed to represent rank and position. But for many women, dressing their beauty was synonymous with dressing for their rank in life, for their beauty is what they would need to use to maintain their power, for women's power in the courts were based on their beauty and allure, and strengthened by their wit and intelligence. Actresses then, again stepped outside the 'appropriate' female rules of deportment, for they had to continually change their clothing and dress for the roles they performed on stage, as well as manipulating their image off the stage.

Section 3: Examining the Portraits

The portraits chosen were not only standard 'uncostumed' portraits of these women such as the 1680 portrait of Anne Bracegirdle, but ones that were painted in costume as well as mythical settings such as Gwynne as Venus and Sir Godfrey Kneller's *William III on Horseback*, 1701. By using a wide variety of both costumed and "uncostumed" portraits the viewer receives a deeper understanding of the image being created. I will draw on a wide range of popular and 'high' culture representations to understand the images being created. The portraits themselves reveal much about the character the women presented onstage and off – their careers and personal life. I would suggest that Gwynne is easily identifiable by her forthright stare and her sensual

portraits. Her head and face are posed and angled in the same manner in almost every portrait.²⁸⁴ Bracegirdle is much more covered in her portraits and posed more demurely, there could be no mistaking one's reputation for the other.

Art historian Geoffrey Squire argues “Like other arts, dress is the product of the creative imagination, transmuting the experiences of mankind into art which “outlives the practical activities of an age, and endures as a permanent revelation of a people’s aspirations.”²⁸⁵ Studying the portraits of Bracegirdle and Gwynne reveals the respective positions to which they aspired – Bracegirdle to gentility and Gwynne to notoriety.

Both Bracegirdle and Gwynne altered their dress to ‘perform’ gentility or seduction in the seventeenth century theatre as a closer look at their portraits suggests. In looking at the representations of Bracegirdle, I will begin with one of the most recognized portraits of her, the one attributed to Thomas Bradwell. The second is an unsigned portrait of Bracegirdle as Semernia, *The Indian Queen*, in Aphra Behn’s *The Widow Ranter*. I will compare Bracegirdle’s image to two portraits of Nell Gwynne. The first portrait is done by Sir Peter Lely, and the second is the portrait of Nell Gwynne as *Venus with Cupid*, painted for Charles II’s personal enjoyment. I will also draw a comparison between upper and lower class ‘signifiers’ in these portraits by juxtaposing them with two upper class portraits, the first being the portrait of a “genteel woman

²⁸⁴ Yet this is not unusual, for as discussed earlier often the heads were painted for one portrait and could be used in several costumes if copies were being made at a later time.

²⁸⁵ Squire, 9.

walking” from the etiquette book *Rudiments of Genteel Behavior*, the second a portrait of Hortense Mancini, Duchess of Mazarin.²⁸⁶

Finally, I place both Bracegirdle and Gwynne alongside paintings of two lower class working women, Netscher’s *The Lace Maker*, 1664, and William Hogarth’s, *Sarah Malcom*.²⁸⁷ From these portraits I draw comparisons to suggest how Anne Bracegirdle pulled elements from both high and low classes to construct her image as a virtuous woman on the stage. Or as Geoffrey Squire suggests “if the fashionable dress of any epoch displays similar, or comparable, characteristics to those observed in a varied selection of other contemporary works of art, then it is justifiable to claim that dress had its part in the total expression of an age.”²⁸⁸ He further argues that it cannot be just a “superficial preference for a particular shape, form or line ... [nor] mere similarity of motif used to decorate a dress, a chair or a cup. Evidence of a definable attitude to life, of a deliberate aesthetic, of marked social preferences and usage, must also be clear.”²⁸⁹ I suggest these portraits are not just marked with similar motifs, but portray a deeper understanding of the actresses and their societal standing.

In the Bradwell portrait, Bracegirdle is shown in an elegant satin gown facing toward the artist in a three-quarter pose, which shows amply her attractive figure. She holds a mask, but she is holding it away from her face, suggesting that she has nothing to

²⁸⁶ This portrait is believed to have been painted between the years 1661-1668, the year in which she deserted an unhappy marriage to run away to the amorous court of Charles II. Payne, Winakor, and Farrell-Beck, 379.

²⁸⁷ Full title *William Hogarth, Sarah Malcom executed in Fleet street, March ye 7th 1732 for Robbing the Chambers of Mrs Lydia Duncomb in ye Temple, and Murdering her, Elis Harrison & Ann Price*, Engraving, 1732. Trustees of the British Museum London.

²⁸⁸ Squire, 33.

²⁸⁹ Squire, 33.

conceal from the viewer. Her hair is dressed on top of her head, swept upward to reveal her pleasant visage and a small smile. The hair style mimics that of the woman in the illustration in *Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour*. Both Bracegirdle and the woman in the illustration face in almost the exact same direction, both with upswept hair. Bracegirdle's portrait however has her looking forward toward the onlookers and not demurely away as the genteel woman. This gives her an appearance of strength and authority 'and perhaps sexual aggressiveness or availability that is not apparent in the aristocratic portrait, where the woman appears much more demure. Yet because Bracegirdle faces forward with a serene half smile, she also seems to possess some of the similar demure characteristics. Both women wear low-cut gowns in the portraits, but they seem to expose only the minimal amount of breast, with lace filling in the edges of the gown.

In comparison, Nell Gwynne's portrait by Sir Peter Lely, although posed similarly to Bracegirdle's, is much more casual in manner, giving her a sense of sensuality not apparent in the previous two portraits. She is posed with her head placed at an almost identical angle, but instead of her eyes looking away as in the demure pose, or steadily gazing forward in an open honest as Bracegirdle appears to be, Gwynne gazes out of the side of her eyes giving her a more sensual suggestive look toward the viewer with a small seductive upward curve to her lips. Gwynne's stature is closer in position to that of Hogarth's portrait of Sarah Malcolm a convicted murderer who had reached a degree of sensationalism for her crimes. They are both seated leaning to the side with the arms to help balance the position. Sarah Malcolm is covered up and 'proper' in her pose with only a hint of softness in her expression, and very sensibly dressed in work clothes that

befitted her station - a working woman - that cover all but the lower portion of her arms, while Gwynne is much more relaxed. Her hair is loosened around her face and shoulders and her gown falls very low exposing a large portion of her breast to the viewer. Her gown is not fitted but loose and flowing around her in sensual folds that give a feeling of soft luxury and sexual invitation to the picture.

Thus the shift did not date the portrait with the style of dress, lending the picture a sense of timelessness. This style, “fancy dress” costume, as first popularized by Van Dyck and then Lely, was a style favored by the court and aristocracy during the last part of the seventeenth century. The shift loose and flowing revealed much of Gwynnes body, and the portrait in this style reveals the station toward which she was ascending. In comparison, Bracegirdle wears the fashionable style of gown that, although fitted and showing her figure to advantage, does not exude the sexuality that Gwynne’s ruffled gown portrays or ascend to the ambitions of aristocracy that Gwynne’s portrait may. Bracegirdle appears dressed as a member of the upper class, and yet through the positioning of her body, she seems slightly out of place in the aristocratic sphere. Often described as a woman of “a lovely height, with dark brown hair, black sparkling eyes, and a fresh blushing complexion; and whenever she exerted herself had an involuntary flushing in her breast, neck, and face,”²⁹⁰ She has too much strength in her gaze to be considered demure, and yet projected herself as earnest and innocent. Gwynne in her portrait portrays a sensuality that Bracegirdle tried to avoid in her roles and

²⁹⁰ John O’Londons weekly “The Diana of the Stage a Great Actress Who Men Loved In Vain,” February, 1925, from the Theatre Museum London Archives.

appearance. The fabrics and drape look more like a courtesan than an actress, or aristocrat.

The second series of portraits I will discuss include portraits in which both Bracegirdle and Gwynne are posed for a 'role', as well as a lower class woman entitled '*The Lace Maker*,' and finally the portrait of Hortence Mancini. These portraits offer a wider range of looks and poses than the previous grouping making it a more difficult task to draw similarities from their positions, but they also suggest the 'available' female image circulating in the seventeenth century marketplace. In this picture, Bracegirdle appears in her costume as a native woman, and yet even though the role of native was traditionally more risqué, she is completely covered up. The lace of her neckline touches the bottom of her throat, exposing no bustline. Her hair is pulled up and all but concealed within the cap that fits down snugly over it, the remaining hair outside secured by the ornate beading. She is positioned in a traditional three quarter pose, with her face almost in profile, eyes gazing into the distance with a wistful expression on her face. Dressed in this costume, she appears to possess more qualities of the lower class portraiture than the upperclass women. She is completely covered as is the lace maker, only in a finer fabric than the poorer woman. The lower class women were dressed completely for a number of reasons, warmth, sturdy clothes for working, to avoid the licentious attentions of randy gentlemen. Bracegirdle tries to cover her sensual nature through her costuming but with the delicate touches such as the beading in her hair and the drape of her hand across her breast; she softens her appearance to a more feminine presentation of the noble savage.

Gwynne, in contrast to Bracegirdle's virtuous images, was portrayed as Venus with her son 'Cupid' at her knee. She not only blatantly flaunts her sexuality, posing nude, but by placing her son in the picture, an illegitimate son by Charles II, she clearly flaunts the 'secret' of her success. Her face and head are painted in almost the exact same pose as the first Lely portrait, with eyes gazing out from the side; head tilted and turned slightly away, hair loose falling unbound around her shoulders and body. Her sexuality emerges in all aspects of the pose, and her appropriation of the role of Venus, suggests it is the one she was most naturally fitted to play. In comparing the look of Hortence Mancini with that of Gwynne there are many similarities in their style. Both have hair that flows down around their shoulders, in dark curling waves. Hortence is dressed in a very low cut off the shoulder gown, which exposes a large amount of her bust. She gazes out the side of her eyes in a very sensual manner similar to Gwynne, with a slight upturn to her darkened full sensual lips. In comparison, Bracegirdle's portrait shows her mouth as faint in color, not the deep rich shade of the other women.

The poses in the paintings being deconstructed were among the ones that were standard for the period, and can be seen time and again in various portraits. What does change, through a modification of fabric, the position of hands or eyes, the feel or atmosphere that the portrait conveys, is how the women were able to transform themselves into a marketable commodity. What is striking is not that both women were able to manipulate their image, but that both women, Bracegirdle and Gwynne were capable of applying the same strategies to their portraiture, and yet through very diverse

forms of manipulation send down to us very different portrayals. Bracegirdle is handed down as the mythical Diana, The eternal virgin, and Gwynne Venus, The King's whore.

Chapter 4: *Filling the Spectrum*

This chapter will explore the biographies of six actresses whose careers cover the range of years from 1660 – 1737, focusing on the actresses that challenge the virgin-whore binaries, fleshing out the range between the two extremes, and exploring why these did not acquire the notoriety of Bracegirdle and Gwynne. Possibly part of their failure stemmed from their inability to capture the “public eye.” These actresses were never able to create a sustainable and “copyrighted” visual image - such as Bracegirdle and Gwynne accomplished - thus making them immediately identifiable beyond a very specific audience.²⁹¹

Section 1: *The Spectrum of Women*

The following biographies help to establish where within the boundaries of the Virgin/Whore dichotomy these women lie. The biographies help to establish the women's background, as well as how the public perceived them and the roles they played before further investigation is done of their portraits.

Although not the first actress to take the stage in the 1660s Mrs. Mary Betterton was one of the first (and certainly one of the most prolific) actresses to take to the stage in the early years of the Restoration.²⁹² Yet theatre historians know little about her or her

²⁹¹ I would suggest that Gwynne is easily identifiable by her forthright stare and her sensual portraits. Her Head and face are posed and angled in the same manner in almost every portrait. Bracegirdle is much more covered in her portraits and posed more demurely, there could be no mistaking one's reputation for the other.

²⁹² Wilson argues there are several women who possibly could be the first actress who played Desdemona in *Othello* for the Kings' Company in November or December of 1660, most probably Anne Marshall, Mary Saunderson Betterton, Margaret Hughes and Mrs. Norton. But he states that Mrs. Corey claims to be the first English actress and that there is information that can back her claim. Wilson 6-7.

career beyond the plays she performed and her reputation for mentoring younger actresses. She married late in life at age 25, when she was already considered an old maid, and even though she was married to an influential actor, Thomas Betterton, her private life is surprisingly unknown.²⁹³ She seldom even delivered the epilogues that helped in creating other actresses identities. *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 - 1800* relates, “Mrs Betterton is only once recorded as having delivered an epilogue.... so though she may have done well in character, her own personality may not have been attractive enough to warrant giving her such assignments.”²⁹⁴ A very dismissive remark considering how little appears known about her.

She was a favorite of Pepys, who having seen her play *Ianthe* in *The Seige of Rhodes* affectionately referred to her as his *Ianthe* throughout his diary. She was most memorable in her dramatic roles such as Lady Macbeth although she seemed to prefer sweeter younger girls and for years played Juliet and Ophelia.²⁹⁵

However, aside from her acting her most notable contribution to the theatre appears to be her training of the younger performers following behind. Childless herself, she fostered young girls Anne Bracegirdle and Elizabeth Watson, presumably grooming

²⁹³ In the Marriage license taken out by Thomas Betterton on December 24, 1662, it states that Betterton a bachelor of 30 will marry the spinster Mary Sanderson 25 with the consent of her widowed mother. Wilson, 117.

²⁹⁴ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-180* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 97.

²⁹⁵ In 1676 she created Belinda in *Man of Mode*, Euardrer in *Shadwekoes*, Toman of Athens 1679 Andromache in Dryden’s *Troilus and Cressida* – Juliet and Ophelia all sweet young girls but she is best known for the roles of Lady Macbeth and Duchess of Malfi. Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 99.

them for the stage.²⁹⁶ Bracegirdle and Watson were not the only young women Mrs Betterton trained, Colley Cibber stated, “when she quitted the stage, several good actresses were the better for her instruction.”²⁹⁷ As early as 1674 she and her husband were training courtly performers for the production of the Masque Calisto. Betterton's chief responsibility was teaching Princesses Mary and Anne (later Queen Anne) and Mrs. Jennings. Her chief function within the company after the turn of the century was training younger performers (boys and girls).²⁹⁸ Her position listed in a public record office document undated but assumed to be from 1705 – 1707 shows “an Establishmt for ye Company” and lists Betterton’s salary and position as “ ‘housekeepr & to teach to act’ for £80 annually half of what Bracegirdle and Barry made as actresses in this period and greatly decrease from her £10 weekly during the 1690s.”²⁹⁹ After her husband's death she no longer trained actresses. She eventually descended into madness and death.

Other actresses such as Elizabeth Barry and Susannah Mountfort were independent single women who were continually lampooned for their promiscuous lifestyles. Unlike Gwynne, they played the role of female rakes, moving from conquest to conquest. Elizabeth Barry was born in 1658 she was the daughter of a barrister named Robert Barry. Her father raised a regiment for Charles I at his own expense which

²⁹⁶ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 97.

²⁹⁷ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 98.

²⁹⁸ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 97.

²⁹⁹ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 98.

bankrupted him financially, so she was taken under the protection of the Davenants at an early age. Through them she received a good education and an acquaintance with people of rank and breeding.³⁰⁰ She is said to have been trained by the Earl of Rochester on a wager. She eventually became his lover as well, bearing him a child in 1677. She finally began to gain larger roles in the 1679-80 season when she played Mrs. Grip in *The Woman Captain*, Olivia in *The Virtuous Wife*, Lavinia in Otway's *Caius Marius*, Camilla in *The Loving Enemies*, Lady Duncie in Otway's *The Soldiers Fortune* and Corina in *The Revenge*. Monimia in Otway's *The Orphan* was her most famous part. Otway tailored many roles for her the actress and had a great passion for her. She played both tragedies and comedies but she seemed most suited to serious roles. She often played opposite Betterton in the Dukes Company as the leading lady to his leading man and Otway wrote *Venice Preserved* for this pair.³⁰¹ Barry was said to be quite free with her favors, taking several lovers over the years including the Earl of Rochester, Sir George Etherege, and Sir Henry St. John, but to Otway's vexation, never him. Yet despite her promiscuous behavior, much like Nell Gwynne she continued to be a favored performer. Yet, she was not above criticism for her behavior,

Theres one heav'n bless us! By her cursed pride
Thinks form ye world her brutish lust to hide
But will that pass in her, whose only sence
Does lye in whoring, cheats, and impudence?
One that is poz all o're, Barry her name,

³⁰⁰ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Vol. 1*, 313.

³⁰¹ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800, Volume 1*, 316.

That mercenary prostituted dame.³⁰²

Richards argues that the fact that “Mrs Barry could still enjoy a respected professional eminence while drawing venomous criticism for the scandal of her private life proved that the skill of an outstanding actress would no longer be denied.”³⁰³ In the 1680s she became involved with the finances of the United Company. Being named in warrants from the Lord Chamberlain’s office to receive payments for play performed by the troupe before royalty this led, in later years, to her serving with Betterton as a co-manager. What she was paid is unknown but Cibber said she was the first performer to receive a benefit in addition to her regular salary. He said this happened in the reign of James II.³⁰⁴

Mrs. Barry's name also appeared on the documents for a new company for which she was (apparently) second in command to Betterton. She was wealthy enough to have loaned 400 pounds to Alexander Davenant in 1693 for a share in the United Company and her salary in 1694 was 50s weekly plus an annual benefit which, if it did not bring in £70 would be made up to that figure by the management.

By 1704 she was being paid about 120 – 150 annually. The only higher paid actress was Mrs. Betterton who received extra for training the younger actors. She retired the spring season of 1710. She was still kept on the company books at 100 annually and

³⁰² Anonymous, *Satyr on the Plays*, 1684.

³⁰³ Richards, 13.

³⁰⁴ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800, Volume 1* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 318.

was promised a benefit before the end of April with £40 house charges. She retired well off financially and well with in her powers.

Curl quoted Mrs. Bradshaw as saying that Mrs. Barry taught her a useful rule: “to make herself mistress of her part, and leave the figure and action to nature.” Aston describes Barry as “not handsome, her mouth opening most on the right side, which she strove to draw t’other way, and at times composing her face, as if sitting to have her picture drawn – she was middle-sized and had darkish hair, light eyes, dark eybrowes, and was indifferent plump. . . she could neither sing nor dance, no not in a country dance.” Curl noted that she “had a peculiar smile . . . which made her look the most genteelly malicious person that can be imagined.”³⁰⁵

Barry was not the only performer who would qualify as a female rake. Another actress, Susanna Mountfort was the daughter of performers William and Susanna Percival Mountfort. She was born on 27 April 1690 and was raised in the theatre.³⁰⁶ In 1703 she is listed at the bottom of a document entitled “Establishmt of ye company,” which proposed actresses for a new company.³⁰⁷ This is the first mention that she followed her parents onto the stage. She played the 1704 season at the Lincolns Inn Theatre and then in 1705 moved to the Drury Lane. She played a number of main roles including Madam Bernard in *The Country House* a role her mother originated as well as Estifania in *Rule A*

³⁰⁵ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800, Volume 1* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973),325.

³⁰⁶Her father, William Mountfort is the actor murdered coming to the defense of Anne Bracegirdle in her foiled kidnapping attempt. Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800, Volume 10* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 353.

³⁰⁷ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800, Volume 10* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 354.

Wife And Have A Wife, the Little Thief in *The Fight Walker*, Berynthia in *Hapmstead Heath*, Ophelia in *Hamlet*, Ruth in *The Committee* and Rose in *The Recruiting Officer*. She disappears from the cast records for a number of years to reappear again in 1712 at the Drury Lane Theatre. Unlike Mrs. Betterton she remained unmarried throughout her career, taking a series of lover including a long term relationship with the actor Barton Boothe whom she played opposite at Drury Lane. Supposedly Boothe proposed marriage, but she had an annuity of 300£ given to her on the condition that she would not marry, so instead of marriage the two lived together for six years.³⁰⁸ The last role ascribed to her is the title character in the *Fair Quaker of Deal* in 1718.

Elizabeth Boutell, although married at a young age, fell into the category of a rake as well. With her husband in the military and often away, she was thought to play the coquette on and off the stage. Curl states “she was a favorite of the town: and besides what she saved by playing, the generosity of some happy lovers enabled her to quit the stage before she grew old.”³⁰⁹ She favored the young innocent characters, for although a favored and considerable actress, she was described as “low of stature, had very agreeable features, and a good complexion, but a childish look. Her voice was weak, tho’ very mellow.”³¹⁰ “With all this merit,” observes Cibber, “she was tractable and less

³⁰⁸ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800*, volume 10 (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 354.

³⁰⁹ Her madness appears to have occurred not long after their marriage, she is rumored the day of her death to hear they were playing Othello, at which point she snuck away from her caretakers to the theatre where she rushed out during Desdemona’s death scene and performed a sensational performance after which she passed away.

³¹⁰ Kalman Curl, *The History of the English Stage*, 1741. As quoted in Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 97.

presuming in her station than several that had not half her pretensions to be troublesome; but she lost nothing by her easy conduct; she had everything she asked for, which she took good care should be always reasonable, because she hated as much to be grudged, as denied a civility.”³¹¹

Frances Maria Knight was another important actress during this period, performing major roles from 1665 -1719 - a longer career than either Bracegirdle or Gwynne - yet historians know far less about her career, perhaps because she was unable to commodify her sexuality or image enough to stand out as the epitome of Virgin or Whore.³¹² She was a prominent actress dancer and singer, with her first known role on stage being that of Angeline in *The Disappointment* in April 1684.³¹³ She was known for her breeches roles as well as being a popular speaker of prologues and epilogues.³¹⁴ By 1691 she seems to have already established a reputation as a loose woman for the epilogue to *Greenwich Park* spoken to the men in the audience by Mrs. Verbruggen with France Maria standing with her states:

If you’r deplease’d with what you’ve sen to night,
Behind southapton house we’ll do you right,

³¹¹ Young innocent characters played: Desdemona, Benzayda in the *Conquest of Granada*, Melantha in *Marriage a la Mode*, Margery Pinchwife in *The Country Wife* Rosalinda in *Sophoisba* Fidelia in *The Plain Dealer* and created Queen Statira in *The Rival Queens* with Anne Oldfield. Burnim, Kahlman, Philip H. Highfil, Jr. and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 261.

³¹² Cibber’s *Apology* as quoted in Edward Robins, *Twelve Great Actresses* (New York and London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1900), 50.

³¹³ The dates of their performances were culled from *The London Stage 1660-1800*, as well as from Index I from Howe, *The First English Actress*, 178, which contains specific dates of new plays and which actresses performed these roles.

³¹⁴ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 9 (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973)*, 58.

Who is't dares draw 'gainst me and Mrs Knight?³¹⁵

This reputation as a loose woman was one she continued to propagate throughout her career. In 1698 in the anonymous *A Letter To A. H. Esq.. Concerning The Stage* alluded to Mrs. Knight's unsavory offstage reputation:

if we should see Mr. Powel acting a Brave, Gernerous and HONEST Part: or MRS Knight, a very Modest and Chaste one, it ought not to give us offence: because we are not to consider what they are off the stage, but whom the represent.³¹⁶

And Tom Brown in his *Letter From The Dead To The Living* in the early eighteenth century furthered the assumptions circulating around her reputation by suggesting that Mrs. Knight was one of the Drury Lane players who sold her favor for gain.

Should I have placed an esteem upon the riches that was left me, the world might have supposed it was the greediness of gain that made me yield my favours: and what had I been better than Madam Ja-es, or Mrs. Knight of Drury Lane: Had I exposed my honour for the Lucre of base coin, and sinned on for the sake only of advantage?³¹⁷

She appears however to be aware of her limitations as an actress and instead of moving with Betterton to the United Company she stayed with Rich where she was almost

³¹⁵ Some of her important roles were Aglaura in the *Commonwealth of Women*, Leonora in the *Libertine*, Flirt in *The Virtuoso*, Teresia in *The Squire of Alsatia*, Mrs Spruce in *The Fortune Hunters*, Ergasto in *Pastor Fido*, The Queen of Navarre in *The Massacre of Paris*, Madame Surelove in *The Widow Ranter*, Dorothea in *The Successssful Strangers*, Constantia in *Madam Fickle*, Queen Margaret in *Richard II*, Volante in *Sir Anthony Love*.

³¹⁶ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 58.

³¹⁷ Anonymous, *A letter to a. H. Esq.: Concerning the Stage* (1698) Augustan Reprint No. 3 (1946), p. 12 as quoted in Wilson 159 in *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand*, 60.

assured an opportunity to play larger roles and tragedies.³¹⁸ She also seemed to have been a shrewd enough business woman for by 1699 she owned in the governing of “the company at Drury Lane in 1699 for she was one of six players who signed for the troupe a contract with the scene painter Robert Robinson.”³¹⁹ She retired in 1724 and little is known of her life after this time.

Kitty Clive is the six and final actress I will consider, and her career begins in the early part of the eighteenth-century and segues into a new era of theatre. The era she dominated marked a shift in the plays towards more subdued, submissive, and passive roles for women. With the onset of sentimental comedies, most of the ambiguous powerful roles for women is appeared. Catherine Clive, known as Kitty, was one of the most “vivacious comediennes and the best female comic singer on the London stage in the middle of the eighteenth century. She was also one of England’s most amusing and most celebrated personages.”³²⁰ W.R. Chetwood in *The General History of the Stage*, states that “Kitty was the daughter of William Raftor, a lawyer of Kilkenny Ireland and heir to a considerable estate which was forfeited because of his adherence to the cause of James II at the battle of the Boyne.”³²¹

Myths abound as to how she came to the stage, but most agree that it was her beautiful voice and appealing looks that made Colley Cibber hire her for twenty shillings

³¹⁸ Tom Brown, *Amusements Serious and Comical and Other Works* reprint ed. Arthur L. Hayward (New York, Dodd, Mead and Company, 1927), 392.

³¹⁹ Some of these roles included Zempoalla in *The Indian Queen*, Bonduca, Cataline in *The Rival Sisters*, Widow Lackit in *Oroonoko*, Elvira in *Agnes des Castro*.

³²⁰ Kalman A. Burnim, Philip H. Highfil, Jr., and Edward A. Langhans, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), 98.

³²¹ *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand Volume 3*, 341.

a week.³²² She started in small incidental roles but rapidly moved up into larger supporting roles and finally leading roles. Chetwood claims “never did any person of her age fly to perfection with such rapidity.” He says that she was first given the trifling part of Ismenes, the page to Robert Wilks’s Zipahares in *Mithridates, King of Pontus*, in April 1728. By the next season open for 1728-29 she was put in rehearsal for larger parts such as Bianca in *Othello* on 12 October and by April 10 the bills were able to advertise that she was singing her usual song. She began to take her place as the chief comedy actress for Drury Lane over the next four decades.³²³

In January of 1729, during Cibber’s *Love in a Riddle*, “there had been a near riot of “the hydra headed multitude” when Mis Raftor came on the stage in the part of Philida, “the monstrous roar subsided. A Person in the stage –box, next to my post [as promter] called out to his companion in the following elegant style – ‘zounds! Tom! take care! Or this; charming little Devil will save all.”³²⁴ Her appeal already appears to be well-rooted in the audience. She was a strong-willed woman with a fiery temper that continually showed itself throughout her career defending her roles from other actresses

³²² *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand Volume 3*, 341.

³²³ One myth surrounding her entrance to the stage states she was washing the Beef-Steak Club’s steps when Mr. Beard and Mr. Dunnstall overheard her singing and Clive was brought to the stage. The second states that a friend had brought her to the song writer John Beard. She was there overheard by Theo Cibber and James Winston – they all living together, and she was taken to Colley Cibber who at once put her down in the list of performers for twenty shillings a week. *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand Volume 3*, 341.

³²⁴ Other roles for this season included Minerva in *Perseus and Andromeda*, Dorinda in the Dryden, Davenant, and Shadwell alteration of *The Tempest*, Honoria in *Love Makes A Man*, Rosella In *The Village Opera*, Valeria in *The Rover*, Flora *The Lover’s Opera*, Bonvira in *The History Of Bonduca*, the title role in *Phebe*, Aresthusa in *The Contrivances* And Maria in *Whig And Tory*, *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand Volume 3*, 341.

with a fury.³²⁵ This temper also tended to cause trouble with the theatre manager Rich as well as Garrick.

She maintained a long term relationship with Horace Walpole throughout the final years of her career. It was not thought to be a sexual relationship, but a friendship that she continued until her death.

Section 2: Theatre - Role Playing and Playing Roles

As female roles began to be played by actresses and not actors “the infinite variety of the theater, and the infinite variety of the seductress . . . grew to be celebrated rather than condemned.”³²⁶ The drama of the period began to reflect the idea of women as seductress with women’s roles exploiting the new found sexuality of actresses playing the female roles on stage. In *The First English Actress* Elizabeth Howe argues actresses were “used [by playwrights], above all, as sexual objects, confirming, rather than challenging, the attitudes to gender of their society.”³²⁷ The “permanent pressures” of the modern capitalistic marketplace molded a female commodity that had to sustain interest and attractiveness for male spectators and consumers.

The woman plays today: mistake me not
No man in gown, or page in petticoat³²⁸

³²⁵ *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand Volume 3*, 341. There was a heated debate between Susanna Cibber and Kitty over the role of Polly in *The Beggar’s Opera* that ultimately was awarded back to Kitty after much consternation.

³²⁶ Howe, 2.

³²⁷ Howe, 37.

³²⁸ Part of a prologue written by Thomas Jordan that helped to show what a ridiculous form men in women’s costume cut on the stage. Henry Wisham Lanier, *The First English Actresses 1660 -1700* (New York, 1930), 31. The full prologue states:

Our Women are defective and so siz’d
You’d think they were some of the guard disguis’d,
For, to speak truth men act, that are between

Although some well known actors - such as Burbage and Kemp - during the pre-civil war years would play specific types of roles, the type casting was not followed nearly as stringently as it was adhered to during the Restoration. It became a matter of course when a play was cast that roles would be “assigned according to the particular ‘lines’ of the players available.”³²⁹ Most playwrights would write their plays with a particular company in mind, and fashion their parts for a particular actor. The playwrights would even write plays that would showcase specific actor’s specialties. An example of this is Colley Cibber’s reworking of his comedy *Woman’s Wit*. In 1697 when he changed theatres, Cibber rewrote the play to incorporate the talents of Thomas Doggett, a popular comedian in his new company. Other examples include Mountfort and Congreve writing roles for Anne Bracegirdle whom they admired, or Southerne writing the play *The Fatal Marriage* (1694) for the comedienne Susannah Mountfort. Southerne stated, “I made the Play for Her Part.”³³⁰

An actor’s or actress’s role tended to be of one or two specific types. Typecasting occurred most obviously with the female roles as there were fewer of them, and the characters tended to conform predominately to a few specific types, weak passive heroines, or saucy, debauched widows. Often a dramatist would write a new play specifically to highlight an actor or actress popular at the time. The actors/actresses

Forty and fifty, wenches of fifteen:
With bones so large and nerve so incompilant, When you call Desdemona, enter Giant . . .
The woman plays today: mistake me not
No man in gown, or page in petticoat.

³²⁹ Howe, 11.

³³⁰ Howe, 11.

physically possessed their roles which were written on scrolls of paper. Once they had created a role they would continue to play the role they sold it, retired from acting, or died.³³¹

There were some exceptions to the stereotypical roles written for women and exceptions to these roles can be found in plays written by both male and female playwrights during this period. Yet the actresses must continually struggle against the prevailing assumption that the profession was revering them “morally dubious.”³³² Restoration playwright, Sir John Vanbrugh often addressed the inequalities between the sexes, and created strong female characters for Restoration actresses to perform. In *The Provok'd Wife* Vanbrugh creates a complicated view of the women's role in the household through his character Lady Brute.³³³ A virtuous wife, Lady Brute, continually suffers hostile treatment from her husband Lord Brute, yet she remains steadfast and faithful to her husband. Although Vanbrugh does not make this situation acceptable in the play, he does not offer an easy solution at the end of the comedy. Ostensibly, the role Vanbrugh presents for women is one of powerlessness and ultimate submissiveness. The audience is left feeling that there can be no happy ending and for women no acceptable solution to their domestic problems except the possible abstention from marriage that Astell promotes. I would argue further, that because the audience was unwilling to

³³¹ Howe, 11.

³³² A prime example is the 1690 bigamy case against the Earl of Banbury and the actress Mrs. Price. The court ruled in favor of the other wife because Price “had been a player and mistress to several persons . . . therefore could not be in a worse condition than before.” Sandra Richards, *The Rise of the English Actress* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1993), 12.

³³³ John Vanbrugh, *The Provok'd Wife* a comedy, as it is acted at the New Theatre in Little Lincolns-Inn-Fields [microform] : by the author of a new comedy, call'd The relapse, or, Virtue in danger. (London : Printed for Richard Wellington ..., and are to sold by Bernard Lintott ..., 1698).

differentiate between the private and public selves of the actresses - melding them into one - the actress can obtain little agency in a role in which although continually abused, she ultimately remains the 'faithful wife.'

Many historians, such as Heidi Hutner, argue that plays written by female playwrights are early feminist works. Restoration plays written by women often mocked men protesting against male oppression and giving more lines to female characters. Female restoration playwrights, Susanna Centlivre and Aphra Behn, both offer strong female characters that challenge the traditional stereotypes of women and their role in society. Often the roles that women were playing on stage - such as in Aphra Behn's play *The Feigned Courtesan* - address the dangerous balance a woman must keep to maintain her propriety, portraying an interesting parallel to the actresses' lives which raises interesting implications for the actresses' position in society. The characters dance between propriety and impropriety as they run away from home and play at being "courtesans," hiding out in search of their lovers.

Behn challenges the roles which women play within society, placing the characters in unconventional situations, but ultimately she marries them into a 'safe' relationship in the end restoring their honor and that of their families. For the actress there is no such easy solution. Hutner argues that "In *The Rover, parts I and II*, the chaotic, unrepressed "other" body of woman is similarly idealized to allow Behn to express a cultural longing for a prelapsarian golden age in which the sexes love mutually and women are desiring subjects rather than passive objects."³³⁴ She argues that "it is

³³⁴ Hutner, 103.

through the body of the ‘other’ woman that Behn articulates her resistance to late-seventeenth-century denials of feminine desire.”³³⁵

Wilson claims the actresses hold a large part of the responsibility for the debauchery of the Restoration plays, for the playwrights were limited in their writing by the women performing in the theatres, and since they were “generally debauch’d and of lewd conversation,” the female roles available to the playwrights were distinctly limited.” I would suggest that the playwrights were writing for an established market - and needed to satisfy the market to earn a living - thus they focused largely on the body as the means by which to negotiate in the marketplace, objectifying rather than subjectifying the actress performing the roles.

Section 3: Presenting the Part

One sign of an actress’s arrival was to have her portrait painted in a favored role.³³⁶ For example, after the production of Cibber’s *Love in a Riddle* (Drury Lane, 1729), in which Kitty Clive portrayed Phillida, the artist Godfried Schalken marked her personal success by painting her in the part.

By 1750 portraits were obviously being used to help publicize the performances as well as the performers that are performing in the evenings entertainments. Notice from *The General Advertiser* of 18 September 1750:

This day at Noon will be publishe’d and sold by the proprietor and print shops, two portraits of those celebrated comedians, Mr Woodward and Mrs Clive in the characters

³³⁵ Richards, 41.

³³⁶ *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand, Volume 3, 351.*

of the Fine Gentleman and Lady in *Lethe* (as they are to perform them tonight, at Drury Lane curiously engraved in miniature from original drawings of the same size. By JJ. Brooks, Engraver of Silber and Copper plate. N.B. the above prints may be had together or separate.)³³⁷

Kitty Clive was portrayed in various costumes throughout her career, including Isabella in the *Old Debauchees*, Philada in *Love is a Riddle* to name a few.

Her posed portraits reflected the refined images of fancy dress in the portraits of the time, closely resembling those done by J. Van Aken. The women all posed casually sitting head turned slightly away with one arm resting up on a table or books and the other draped in their lap. The pose is similar to a drawing by Van Aken who had based his pose on Kneller's Anne Duchess of Bolton.³³⁸ The two are almost identical in pose. What she does lack are the pearls that are ever present in so many of the upper-class women's portraits of this period. Her pleasant countenance draws the viewer in to her face where she possesses an enigmatic smile.

Her portraits in costumed roles however, appear to project more the coquette. As Philida she is wearing a very low cut dress and the lightness of her skin against the darker background draws the eye in toward her chest and face, the same areas that are the focus in the portrait of Lether in *The Fine Lady*. She is poised to take flight leaning forward; arms back chest thrown forward leaning out toward the viewer. The portraits of the actresses costumed reflect a fanciful, even provocative image to the audience - the audience of the portraits as well as the plays, one that is not usually represented in the

³³⁷ *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers, and Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660 – 1800, Volume 2: Belfort to Byzand Volume 3*, 351.

³³⁸ Aileen Ribeiro, *The Dress Worn At Masquerades In England, 1730 To 1790, And Its Relation To Fancy Dress In Portraiture* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1984), 179.

fashionable portraits. The use of the costumes in portraits than present to the audience, the reader, a multifaceted face, that of the character as well as the actress. The actress becomes intriguing - an enigma as the many sides of her personality and persona are placed on display in the marketplace for the consumers.

Chapter 5: *The Final Curtain: Portraying Images to Come*

As the eighteenth century progressed the rigid dichotomy of Virgin or Whore that had been established began to become more diffuse as the first English actresses paved the way for the actresses who followed them. This established a means by which they could navigate the emerging marketplace and maintain agency in the creation of their own image. Although throughout the eighteenth century the roles women played on stage

continued to objectify them, early actresses created the foundation upon which the actresses would manipulate their images on and off the stage. This allowed those actresses that followed to possess a greater measure of control in shaping their public image. This control is ultimately epitomized in the great Sarah Siddons.

Sarah Siddons, who became popular for her figure, physical beauty, and her grace of movement in her tragic roles, would not have been able to commodify her image in such an expansive manner if it was not for the earlier Restoration actresses' struggle for control. Siddons embodied Francis Douglas's late seventeenth century definition of a woman as outlined in *Reflections on Celibacy and Marriage* (1771): "While under the influence of virtue and principle, the most amiable and most respected part of the creation: unrestrained by these and the rein given to her passions, the meanest, and most despised of all rational beings."³³⁹

She was an embodiment of the neoclassical style. The portraits painted of her further underscored her virtuous beauty, for the artists continually portray her regally seated, or classically posed, creating an air of royalty that places her above the ordinary actress. The roles which women portrayed on the stage were still not a true representation of women, but instead placed the actresses in roles that continued to objectify them. However, that objectification had become less a target of sexual desire and more one of ideal womanhood. Donkin argues in her article "Mrs. Siddons Looks Back in Anger: Feminist Historiography for Eighteenth - Century British Theater" that not only

³³⁹ Francis Douglas, *Reflections of Celibacy and Marriage in Four Letters to a Friend; In Which the Advantages, and Disadvantages of the Two States are Compared* (London: L. Hawes, J. Clark, and J. Collin. 1771; reprint, New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984) page.

did the role objectify women “in the world of the play but also, by extension, in the world at large.”³⁴⁰

Donkin states the ideal woman presented on the stage had a positioning effect on the real women of the period, posing demands on how they were expected to “live their lives, on what men expected from them, and on what they expected from themselves.”³⁴¹

On October 5, 1784 at the height of her popularity, Siddons addressed the audience chastising them for their censorship of her. She declared “my respect for the public leads me to be confident that I shall be protected from unmerited insult.”³⁴² What she did, intentionally or not, could be seen as a turning point for actresses on the stage. Women had addressed the audience before, prologues and epilogues as example, but what Siddons did, to come out and address the audience on their behavior, was unprecedented. With this she forced the audience to consider her in the performance that was to follow, no longer as just an object, but as a woman, a subject, that is performing a part, the acting was seen to be a production of the actress and not coextensive with the actress. This distinction made possible a different complexity of female presence both on the stage and in the audience, “a distinction that the audience had not made - between the actress as person and the character portrayed - during the 18th century.”³⁴³ And with this complexity came a greater separation between the actress and her onstage performances and the actress in her life offstage for the audience.

³⁴⁰ Ellen Donkin, “Mrs. Siddons Looks Back in Anger: Feminist Historiography for Eighteenth-Century British Theater,” in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle B. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1995), 278.

³⁴¹ Donkin, 278.

³⁴² Donkin, 284.

³⁴³ Donkin, 285.

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