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Low Brows and High Profiles: Rhetoric and Gender in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century Theater

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LOW BROWS AND HIGH PROFILES: RHETORIC AND GENDER IN THE
RESTORATION AND EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY THEATER

by

ELIZABETH TASKER

Under the Direction of Lynée Lewis Gaillet

ABSTRACT

The Restoration and early eighteenth century theaters of London formed an important mixed-gender rhetorical venue, which was acutely focused on the age-old “querrelle des femmes” (or woman question). The immediate popularity of the newly opened Restoration theaters, the new practice of casting actresses rather than actors in female roles, and the libertine social climate of London from 1660 to the early 1700s created a unique rhetorical situation in which women openly participated as speakers and audience members. Through a methodology combining genre study, feminist historiography, performance theory, Bitzer’s rhetorical situation, and Habermas’ notion of the public sphere, this dissertation reclaims the Restoration theatre as one of the earliest public, secular, mixed-gender rhetorical venues in the English-speaking world.

London theater of the Restoration and the early eighteenth century presents a feminist kairos for rereading and revisioning the actress from object to subject, from passive receiver to deliverer of performative rhetoric. Overall, the attention given to issues of femaleness in the plays of this period exceeds that of preceding and subsequent

periods. The novelty of the actresses, as well as disillusionment with the male-dominated government and system of patriarchy, were surely the major contributing factors that led to the female focus on stage. This phenomenon of female rhetoric also reflects the charisma, elocutionary skill, and visual rhetoric of the best female performers of the period, including: Nell Gwyn, Mary Saunderson Betterton, Elizabeth Barry, Anne Bracegirdle, Susannah Mounfort Verbruggen, Anne Oldfield; and Lavinia Fenton, all of whom are discussed from a rhetorical perspective in this dissertation.

INDEX WORDS: Restoration theater, Restoration actresses, Eighteenth century actresses, historical rhetoric, theater history, rhetoric of drama, rhetoric and performance, Elizabeth Barry, Nell Gwynn, Susannah Mountfort, Susannah Verbruggen, Anne Bracegirdle, Anne Oldfield, Lavinia Fenton, feminist historical rhetoric

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ELIZABETH TASKER

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Georgia State University

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Elizabeth Anne Tasker
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To Eva, Ruby, and Bubbles, my two grandmothers and my great aunt, three strong women who each left their unique rhetorical imprint on this earth.

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Thank you to my family for your tremendous support and patience over the past five and a half years. Words cannot fully express my gratitude. I will make it up to you in deeds. Also, many thanks to my dissertation committee, especially to my advisor and mentor, Lynée Gaillet Lewis.

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DEAR READERS,

The work you are about to read is more than a feminist recovery of the rhetorical acts of women from a historical period. It is an interdisciplinary border crossing in search of, as Andrea Lunsford suggests, the “forms, strategies and goals used by women as rhetorical” (6). This project requires me to trespass, if not erase, the traditional boundaries of the established disciplines of rhetoric, drama, theatre history, and literary criticism in order to illuminate a particular place centuries ago where not only the idea of woman but women themselves made a formal and substantive impact on the public consciousness. I call this impact rhetoric. The place in time I call the rhetorical venue, and the circumstances within and surrounding the venue I describe, in a borrowing from Lloyd Bitzer, as the rhetorical situation.

The rhetorical situations that form the subject of my study are those of the Restoration and the early eighteenth-century theater in London. In this dissertation, I aim 1) to demonstrate how the Restoration theater created a mixed-gender rhetorical venue with its own unique and highly gender-based rhetorical forms, 2) to reclaim the value of the Restoration actresses to the modern female rhetorical tradition, and 3) to assert the validity of an interdisciplinary, belletristic stance for examining the reciprocal relationship between rhetoric, public performance, and popular culture. My rationale for this rhetorical recovery takes precedence from scholarship and theory from classical times to the present, including classical rhetoric and poetics, eighteenth century

belletristic and elocutionary theory, and contemporary theories on the public sphere, the rhetorical situation, and feminist recovery rhetorics and performance theory. Another rich source for my work is the ongoing conversation of theatre history, which, I will show, is interrelated with the history of rhetoric. My study, then, requires your willingness to consider a broad array of concerns from history, rhetoric, and drama. With my motives laid before you, I ask the indulgence of your attention to the observations, theories, and arguments penned by

Yours truly,

Elizabeth Tasker, Ph.D.

CONTEXTS: HISTORY, RHETORIC, AND DRAMA

Fissuring the Monolith

History is not what I thought it was. As a girl growing up, I thought that history was a timeline of important dates, dynasties, wars, and events, affairs of the state, basically, boring. Stories, on the other hand, were interesting; they were mimesis, made-up copies of life. Over the course of living and the experiences of college, travel, work, marriage, and motherhood, after reading many books and watching many movies, my view of history has changed. I now see history as stories, from the grandest narratives, to detailed eyewitness accounts, to the smallest anecdotes. In a sense, whatever is remembered is history; whatever is forgotten ceases to exist—until it is remembered again.

The period of European history spanning from the late sixteenth to the eighteenth century, often known as the Enlightenment, is remembered for the ideas of Descartes, Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke, among other men. Together, their theories shaped a radical new worldview that privileged the knowledge and will of the individual over the auspices of traditional authority and paved the way for a new empiricism. One of the earliest Enlightenment thinkers, French philosopher Renée Descartes, foregrounded human perception with his method for achieving knowledge (*Discourse on Method* 1637). In England, Francis Bacon published the *Essays* (1597) and the *Nova Organon* (1605), which advocated learning based on observation and reason by inductive logic.

Thomas Hobbes' *The Leviathon* (1660) described the innate competitiveness of human beings and the position of ruler not as an object ordained by God but one born out of the need of the populace for a head to maintain civil order. A few decades after Hobbes, John Locke urged philosophies based on individual perception, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), and the need for political change, in *Two Treatises on Government* (1690). Together the diverse ideas of these men represented a new epistemology based on the experience and psychology of the individual—a mindset that engulfed and affected every facet of culture throughout Europe, including philosophy, science, politics, theology, literature, and rhetoric. But, for the most part, women were not recognized as factoring into this new world view. As Rebecca Merren writes, for much the seventeenth century, “the seemingly disparate discourse communities of literature, science, theology, and political philosophy all worked to create a stable space for patriarchal authority by variously constraining, rejecting, and dissecting the feminine” (32). Over the course of the Enlightenment, legally, women remained subjugated as patriarchal property, and intellectually they were still viewed by many as unreliable and incapable of the rigorous demands of empirical thinking.

Nevertheless, the tide of the Enlightenment also carried a strong undercurrent of female voices, which rippled through various venues of European society. These feminine stirrings, which Derek Hughes has characterized as “fissuring a monolith” of patriarchal ideology (8-9), included the voices of a few well-known English females, including Bathsua Makin, Margaret Fell, and Mary Astell, all of whom, following in the footsteps of a noticeable handful of Renaissance females, produced sermons, treatises,

and speeches that aimed to elevate the social standing of women. Bathsua Makin, author of *An Essay to Revive the Ancient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673), was a teacher and advocate of education for aristocratic women in England; she believed that only wealthy and gifted women should be educated in rhetoric and logic, not for the purpose of public discourse and professions, but for the ability to hold well-reasoned conversation. She also believed that women should be educated in the vernacular language of their culture and that they needed skills to take charge of their lives in case they were widowed or left alone when men were called to war. Another vocal female, Quaker woman Margaret Fell, despite repeated arrests and societal scorn, spoke uncompromisingly at the pulpit and in treatises such as *Woman's Speaking Justified, Proved, and Allowed by the Scriptures* (1666) for the causes of woman's intellectual equality and right to publicly bear religious witness. Mary Astell, probably the most well-known female rhetorical theorist of the eighteenth century, published in the traditional rhetorical genres of the treatise, pamphlet, and letter, from 1694 to 1709, on a variety of social and philosophical subjects focused primarily on gender, education, rhetoric and composition, marriage, religion and politics. Best known for her three treatises, *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies Part I* (1694), *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies Part II* (1697), and *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700), Astell used logic, persuasive argument, appeals to Christian values, Enlightenment philosophy, and common sense to put forth her proposals. But the activities of these female writers and speakers during the seventeenth century were not the norm, and rhetoric was not generally a field open to women.

In fact, during the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, female education took a step backward from where it was during the Renaissance. During the period of Christian Humanism often associated with the European Renaissance, girls were educated along with boys in the Humanist schools, although women were rarely allowed to use their rhetorical education for any type of public speaking (Bizzell and Herzberg 562). Even prior to Humanism, during the medieval period when neither rhetoric in general nor education for women were widespread practices, women were able to learn rhetorical skills on the job, so to speak, in family businesses, which required knowledge of *ars dictamen*, or letter writing (Herrick 137; Bizzell and Herzberg 443-444, 446). The rise of Humanism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries brought even more educational opportunities and a greater proliferation of women writing and publishing, especially in continental Europe but also in England with the most famous example being Queen Elizabeth I. But throughout the Renaissance, the social structure of patriarchy remained entrenched, and, after the decline of the Humanist movement, women “were almost completely excluded from university education, where the most advanced education in rhetoric took place, until well into the nineteenth century” (Bizzell and Herzberg 749). The later seventeenth century also saw a decrease in working women (Howe 26). Despite the decrease in educational and professional opportunities for females in the later seventeenth century, the female half of the European population was not entirely mute. A closer examination of the supposed monolith of western patriarchy reveals it as cracked and veined with numerous tales of feminist apology, indirect subversion, and open dissent. Although the literacy rate of women in England has been estimated to be less

than 20 percent in the seventeenth century and less than 50 percent in the eighteenth century (Bizzell and Herzberg 748-750), the literate segment of the female population were producing written works in many forms, including poetry, romance, drama, prose fiction, dialogs, letters, and other forms, both public and private. We are still learning that female voices were never completely silent, but for centuries women were silenced by their exclusion from rhetorical venues, and female writers were silenced simply by their not being assimilated into the literary and rhetorical canons.

Over the past forty years, however, both the British literary canon and the western rhetorical canon have been reinvigorated with recovered works by female authors from the Enlightenment who increasingly have been the subjects of critical studies by such scholars as Anderson, Donawerth, Hughes, Pearson, Sutherland, Todd, and many more. The fact that women published during the seventeenth and eighteenth century is a rhetorical act in itself. But some female authors of the period also theorized their writing processes, the structure and content of their writing, and the venues in which they worked and published. Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle, for example, was a prolific author and intellectual. Exiled in France with her husband during the English Interregnum, Cavendish mixed in the elite circles of Descartes and Hobbes (who was at that time writing *The Leviathon*). During the latter half of the seventeenth century, Cavendish wrote many plays, essays, poems, and other works, such as the utopian novella *The Blazing World* (1666), which is considered one of the earliest examples of science fiction. In addition to appearing in many recent literary anthologies, Cavendish is also anthologized in Jane Donawerth's *Rhetorical Theory by Women Before 1900* for her

work titled *The World's Olio* (1655), a commonplace book containing journal entries and short essays in which she asserts women's rights to write due to their natural gifts of eloquence that come from innate conversational ability and easy, readable style. Mary Astell is another female author who published significant works of rhetoric in the late seventeenth century, including a lengthy statement of rhetorical theory, which covers ninety-six pages in chapter three of *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, Part II*. Astell's work is valuable not only for its educated female perspective but for connecting seventeenth-century French rhetorical theory with the emerging philosophical and rhetorical developments of eighteenth-century Britain.

The question is, then, with mounting evidence of female rhetorical activity, why did we until recently know so little about female rhetoric of the Enlightenment? One reason is, as Hughes has pointed out, that men controlled "the writing of history and the management of law" (10). Men also defined the academic and professional fields, and they controlled the elite rhetorical venues that allowed little to no participation by women. Thus, female voices continued to lack historical and political representation. Another reason is the circumscribed realm of rhetoric imposed by the patriarchal definition of what constitutes rhetorical theory and practice. From its beginnings in the classical period to the eighteenth century, rhetoric was defined as the study, composition, and practice of public speech, an all-male activity. Even in the late twentieth century, scholars of historical rhetoric viewed Enlightenment rhetoric as consisting strictly of the practice of public oratory and academic theories on the art of using language for persuasion and moral reasoning—activities pursued almost exclusively by men in the

context of the university, the church, the law courts, and political forums. In the last twenty years, however, feminist historiographers and researchers have successfully led a movement to expand the boundaries of the traditional rhetorical canon across all periods of history to include women's rhetorics.

Feminist historiography of rhetoric explicitly calls for examining historic situations in which women theorized about speech and writing, used language publicly, or persuaded an audience (Lunsford, Glenn, Donawerth, Ritchie and Ronald, Bizzell and Herzberg). Feminist research in historic rhetoric also includes reexamination of the traditional rhetorical canon for gendered rhetoric. Over the past twenty years or so, researchers have employed a variety of historiographic methods in search of feminist rhetoric, including: rereading canonical texts; locating new authors, texts, and cultural sites of rhetoric; re-visioning female silence; reclaiming female rhetorical practices; and remapping rhetorical history to include female forms of rhetoric. One of the earliest works of feminist historiography in rhetoric, Karolyn Kors Campbell's *Man Cannot Speak for Her* (1989), which details the rhetoric of selected nineteenth-century American females, began a trend in the field to locate historic female rhetorical practices. Since the 1990s, studies by Jarratt, Glenn, Lunsford, Johnson, Ronald and Ritchie, and many others, have met with tremendous success in discovering female rhetoric from classical times to the present. Most recovery work has focused on the classical period (Jarratt; Swearingen), the Renaissance (Glenn; Donawerth; Newman) and the nineteenth century (Campbell; Hobbes; Johnson; Logan; Royster; Buchanan).

Also in the early 1990s, a key debate in feminist historical research methods began when in 1993 Barbara Biesecker stated that recovery work like Campbell's *Man Cannot Speak for Her*, which focuses on individual female figures, reinforces patriarchal research practices and elitist hierarchies that cause the oppressed to remain silent; Biesecker argues that "no individual woman or set of women, however extraordinary, can speak for all women" (Coming to Terms 158). In "Biesecker Cannot Speak for her Either," Campbell sensibly responds that, by excluding singular acts of female rhetoric, we fail to have anything to examine and that Biesecker's argument only results in silencing female voices. But, just as the concept of *postmodern*, which seemed so slippery a few years ago, is now more concrete, Biesecker's challenge now seems less vague as time and thought have allowed scholars of historical rhetoric to consider the possibilities. As Biesecker predicted, we have arrived at a point in time when her views and Campbell's no longer seem to contradict each other.

Recent scholarship in feminist rhetorical historiography is discovering not just new (female) figures to add to the existing canon but new realms for female rhetoric. A strong example of feminist historical scholarship into female rhetorical venues is Nan Johnson's *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life: 1866-1910*. Like Campbell, Johnson is focused on nineteenth century American women's rhetoric, but instead of concentrating on select figures, Johnson grounds her methodology on her view of rhetoric as a *cultural site* (1). The parlors of late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, states Johnson, comprised a cultural site that offered rhetorical training and practice for women. But, Johnson argues, the postbellum parlor movement in elocutionary training

was in fact a conservative vehicle for keeping women's rhetorical activities "stranded in the parlor" and out of the public eye (14). Johnson makes an important point: not all historic female rhetoric is feminist liberation rhetoric; much of it is females finding voices and the means to speak within their cultural circumstances. Cultural sites and historic female rhetoricians have both been the subjects of feminist historiography over the past twenty years, but female rhetoric during the period of the European Enlightenment, roughly the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, remains overlooked for the most part.

In much of the existing scholarship, researchers tend to identify seventeenth-century female rhetoric with Renaissance Humanism, a movement usually associated with the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The association of seventeenth-century women's rhetoric with an intellectual movement of earlier centuries is due in part to researchers' observations of humanist rhetorical strategies used by seventeenth-century women and in part by a general perception in the field of historic rhetoric that women in every period lagged behind men in their education and knowledge of advancements in philosophy, science, and rhetoric. Thus, while late seventeenth-century male-authored rhetoric is often seen as belonging to the Enlightenment, female-authored rhetoric of the same period is identified most often with the Renaissance (King and Rabil; Donawerth; Sutherland). This association of seventeenth-century female rhetoric with Humanism can be seen in contemporary scholarship by Christina Sutherland and Erin Herberg on the rhetoric of Mary Astell and by Jane Donawerth and Karen Newman on the rhetoric of Madeleine de Scudery (although Sutherland and Herberg also discuss Astell's

relationship to the Enlightenment). Yet, seventeenth-century female-authored texts and performances that emphasize perception, experience, and expression and call attention to women as individuals are also aligned with Enlightenment philosophy, and those that extend the boundaries of the marginalized female role in society should be considered highly persuasive, hence rhetorical. Researchers need to reexamine the cultural sites of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that enabled and facilitated public or semi-public female expression and rhetorical acts.

An aspect of late seventeenth and eighteenth-century rhetoric that until recently has been largely ignored by the field is the emergence of mixed-gender rhetorical venues that allowed and encouraged female participation, where women were not seen as appropriating men's rhetoric, and where the female point of view was heard and examined by everybody who participated. One such mixed-gender venue is the seventeenth-century Parisian salon, which provided a gathering place for the elite, educated circles of the upper classes of French society. In the salons, women held positions of leadership, and they had direct influence on the form and the content of rhetoric. Jane Donawerth is responsible for identifying Madeleine de Scudery as the main rhetorical theorist for what has become known as salon rhetoric. Donawerth writes, "In works published between 1642 and 1684, Madeleine de Scudery formulated a new rhetoric of conversation for the French Salon, and included women as central participants" ("Conversation" 184). Just in the past fifteen years, several scholars of Renaissance rhetoric have begun to examine Scudery as an "other" rhetorical voice of the late renaissance—one with more authority and rhetorical intent than previously realized

(Donawerth; Goldsmith; Newman). The influence of Madeleine de Scudery on the female rhetorical tradition was notable among her contemporaries and among the next generation of the eighteenth century. In *Serious Proposal to the Ladies Part II*, Mary Astell recommends Scudery as one of the five authors that women should read for their education. With their similarly conservative views of loyalty to the monarchy mixed with an insistence on the intellectual equality of women and men, Scudery stands as a logical influence on Astell. Scudery's influence is apparent in Astell's focus on conversation as the realm of women's rhetoric (Bizzell and Herzberg 845).

The art of conversation came to be recognized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the first truly accepted female rhetorical activity. Less formal, less public, and less theorized than traditional masculine forms of rhetoric, conversation used in social gatherings and epistolary correspondence was still an important rhetorical component of European society. The female rhetorical tradition of conversation is traceable from the seventeenth-century Parisian salons to turn-of-the-century England and the rhetorical theory of Mary Astell, and on to later eighteenth-century England where we find the elite group of women known as the Bluestockings. Avid practitioners of cultured conversation, letter writing, and poetry, the intellectual Bluestockings included Lady Mary Wortley Montague, Elizabeth Talbot, and Elizabeth Carter among others. The Bluestockings saw themselves as women of the literary high sort. But just less than a century earlier and arguably more influential on the public consciousness were another group of persuasive ladies who society viewed as the literary low sort, namely

the female playwrights and actresses of the Restoration and early eighteenth century London theater.

It is my contention that some of the most influential rhetoric delivered by and about women during the Restoration and the early-eighteenth century occurred in the theaters of London, which Charles II reopened when he was restored to the British throne in 1660. Shortly after his Restoration, Charles gave his famous edict that female roles would be played by female actresses rather than male actors.¹ Almost immediately, the Restoration theatre became a mixed-gender rhetorical venue in which audiences expected women to speak and paid attention to female rhetoric. Just as women influenced the rules and content of salon rhetoric, they suddenly began to have a major influence on what was said and done on the stage. But, unlike the semi-private salon venue, the Restoration theater was a public space.

In terms of what the Restoration theater did for women, the public debut of the actress on the English stage marked the first time in English history that a group of professional women, not just an individual female, commanded a sustained and popular public voice. The Restoration theatre gave females a public venue for rhetorical performance in which they were fully vested as speakers and as audience members. In fact, it was the largest, most public, secular, rhetorical venue available to women in that

¹ Women had been on stage in countries such as Italy, France, and Spain for over a century prior to the year of Charles' Restoration in England. French and Italian acting companies and their actresses had toured England. Also, English women, including Charles I wife, Queen Henrietta Marie, acted in private court masques. But prior to the Restoration, no English women were seen on the London public stage.

period of English history.² As speakers and spectators, females influenced the content, performance, and reception of Restoration and early eighteenth-century drama. In particular, the advent of the actress has a profound impact on the female's potential as a public figure, artist, and vocal member of society. This dissertation argues that a new level of awareness of the female condition was brought about by the persuasive performances of actresses on stage and that Restoration and early eighteenth-century drama constitutes an important cultural site of female rhetoric. Furthermore, I contend that the dedicated chronicling of Restoration and early eighteenth century theater history over the centuries, with its wealth of theatrical records, anecdotes, and critiques of performance, provides a rich body of material for rhetorical study.

The overall contribution of actresses to the Restoration theater has been broadly and deeply described in centuries of fascinating theater histories (Cibber; Langbaine; Summers; Van Lennep; Staves; Holland; Weber; Styan; Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans; Howe; Lowenthal; Marsden).³ As many of these historians and theorists have noted, it is often difficult to sift the fact from legend in this history. But from Langbaine and Cibber

² Salons and coffee houses also provided mixed gender rhetorical venues for conversation, but the theater was unique as a public and highly performative mixed-gender venue.

³ The fascinating subject of the debut of the English actresses has garnered a small but sustained stream of attention throughout theater history. Over the period of 1935-1965, William Van Lennep and his colleagues combed historic playbills, newspapers, and theatrical diaries to create *The London Stage: 1660 – 1800*, a comprehensive chronology of London's theatrical history, which includes a thorough introduction to the major components of the Restoration theater, including the introduction of the actress, as well as a month-by-month listing of performances, casting, debuts, and other announcements and brief commentary. A more detailed account of the lives and contributions of individual actresses can be found in *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800* by Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans. Recent work focused on women playwrights of the Restoration offers further insights to the female dimension of Restoration theater and eighteenth century theater; these include Jaqueline Pearson's, Misty Anderson's, Kreiss Shenk's, and Derek Hugh's.

in the eighteenth century to Summers and Van Lennep in the early twentieth centuries, to the writers of today, theater historians agree that during the Restoration and early eighteenth century, the presence of the actresses was paramount to drama, inspiring playwrights, influencing the structure and content of the plays, and broadening the face of public discourse. Some have argued the presence of the actress facilitated the emergence of professional female playwrights, who wrote sympathetically about women's issues (Hughes, Pearson, Todd, Gallagher). Many have also noted that, in response to the talent and depth of realism brought to the stage by the Restoration actresses, a fair number of male playwrights began creating sympathetic female roles and themes in their plays (Hughes, Howe). In the 1970s, the work of Susan Staves marks the beginning of a more concerted effort to theorize not only the artistic but the cultural significance of the Restoration theater and its various components and influences. In *Player's Scepters: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration*, Staves "tries to understand how changes in ideas about authority were shaped by common cultural experiences shared by late seventeenth-century English philosophers, dramatists, ...and the less distinguished ladies and gentlemen who were their audience" (xvi). Although Staves' work is not centered on actresses, per se, many studies on the actress cite her theories of how femaleness became a central theme in the theater.

The most comprehensive study to date centering on Restoration actresses is Elizabeth Howe's *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama 1660-1700*. In it, Howe explores both the "general dramatic consequences" of female actresses on the London stage and the "individual influences of the various major actresses...on the plays

that were written for them” (x). Recent integration of performance theory into conversations about Restoration and early eighteenth century theater, especially by Cynthia Lowenthal and Jean Marsden, has helped explain the broader cultural impact of the actresses’ performances in this period. But the theater of the Restoration and early eighteenth century has not been studied from the perspective of feminist historical rhetoric. Here I will show that the Restoration and early-eighteenth century theaters of London functioned as an important mixed-gender rhetorical venue that created and showcased female-focused rhetorical practices in a variety of forms. My study will also reveal female-centered theories of persuasion, performance and delivery, and a feminist consideration of audience analysis, silence, and rhetorical training.

Methodology for Treating Theatre as Rhetoric

Precedents

On the surface, the treatment of theater as rhetoric may seem misleading. One obvious question is why combine the study of drama and rhetoric at all? Each field is already well-defined through its own professional community, and the two fields are more often than not represented by separate departments in the university environment. Theatrical performance is not speech-making except for, perhaps, the direct address used in prologues and epilogues. Traditionalists in either field could argue that combining the study of drama and rhetoric only serves to generalize and dilute both disciplines. But on

both a theoretical and a practical level, the close connection between drama and rhetoric has intertwined the two disciplines for thousands of years.

Dating back to classical times, theories of poetics have included analyses of rhetorical appeals, devices, and other persuasive elements, while theories of rhetoric have often drawn principles and examples from acting and performance. The connection between rhetoric and poetics is clearly seen in the work of Aristotle, especially in his common use of emotional appeals in both drama and oratory. In *Poetics*, Aristotle defines the persuasive elements of tragedy as the arousal of emotions of pity and fear in the audience. Similarly, in Book 2 of *On Rhetoric*, he presents the concept of pathos as the ability of a speaker to appeal to the emotions of the audience. Aristotle makes additional ties between rhetoric and drama in his description of metaphor as a rhetorical device that facilitates showing or, as he says, “bringing before the eyes” (3.3.4). His views on metaphor and enthymeme as devices involving the act of showing are both highly performative and persuasive.⁴ Similar to Aristotle’s work on poetics and rhetoric, Horace’s *Art of Poetry* uses a rhetorical approach “in its concern for poetry’s effect on the audience” (Murray xxxix) and Longinus’ *The Sublime* emphasizes noble diction and the use of rhetorical figures to convey emotion (Murray xlvii-xlviii). The influence of Aristotle is also evident in Cicero’s *The Ideal Orator*, which describes arousing pity in an audience “by which an orator aims at changing hearts and influencing them in every

⁴ In *Drama As Rhetoric/Rhetoric As Drama: Theatre Symposium*, August Staub’s essay “The Enthymeme and the Invention of Troping in Greek Drama” describes Aristotle’s enthymeme as the most powerful device in tragedy for building group consensus and linking myths together in an enacted, “public and entirely visual event” (9).

possible way” (2.212). Cicero also makes frequent comparisons of orators with both poets and actors, and his observations on the use of humor, “banter,” and “sharp-wittedness” in oratory suggest strong affinities with the techniques, appeals, and devices of dramatic comedy (2.219-290).

But the strongest tie between rhetoric and drama in Cicero can be construed in the last fourteen paragraphs of *The Ideal Orator* in which he describes delivery as the ultimate test of effective oratory (3.213). He stresses the importance of the voice, the face—especially the eyes, and bodily gestures, noting that all of these tools are needed by both orators and actors if they are to be convincing. Quintilian also ties delivery as a common thread between oratory and acting. Using examples of emotionally powerful stage performances, Quintilian analyzes delivery as consisting of two main parts: voice and gesture. He describes voice as an appeal to the ear, which the speaker controls through volume, tone, and quality in order to effect his purpose in speaking (11.3.15-11.3.18). Quintilian then treats gestures in similar detail, giving specifics about the head, face, neck, shoulders, hands, body, and feet. In the tradition of Cicero and Quintilian, Amy Richlin has recently conducted a fascinating historical research study of gendered rhetorical and dramatic delivery in ancient Rome. As Richlin explains, Roman rhetorical theory differentiates between Attic and Asiatic (or Asianist) styles of delivery: with Attic seen as masculine, authoritative, and objective and Asiatic as feminine, flamboyant, and emotional. According to Richlin, Atticist was the prescribed, clean, and trusted style; Asianist was the despised, sexy and distrusted style. While Atticist, manly, plain style, was more socially acceptable, the Asianist, flowery, expressive style may actually have

been more interesting to watch on stage and may have held more audience appeal. Richlin describes Roman training in oratory as the development of a consciously masculine skill in which signs of femininity (high or faltering voice, uneven use of literary figures, erratic gesturing, and immodest or flamboyant dress) were frowned upon. These undesirable traits would make an orator appear and sound like an actor, a profession that was considered effeminate and “suffered a diminished civil status” (100). While the Roman oratorical rules about gesture and eye movements made oratory very much like acting and even dancing, the masculinity of Roman social strictures called for restraint. This situation reflects the debate about Attic and Asiatic delivery style, which became highly politicized in late classical Rome. According to Bizzell and Herzberg, Cicero saw both styles as too extreme and outmoded and preferred to develop style based on what he thought would appeal to a contemporary audience (284-285). However, many scholars, such as Richlin, cite Cicero, who was one of the most memorable of Roman orators, as a user of the Asianist style.

These classical theories of delivery, rhetoric, and poetics by Cicero, Quintilian, Longinus, Horace, and Aristotle were eventually translated into French and English and became highly influential in the development of new critical methodologies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Over the course of the long eighteenth century in England, classical influences combined with Enlightenment ideals, resulting in the rise of four important rhetorical movements—the neoclassic, the psychological-philosophical, the belletristic, and the elocutionary—each of which are characterized by unique literary and rhetorical theories that have their own links to drama. Neoclassic methodologies are

visible in the idea of the public man as orator, a shift towards civic themes and rationalism, and a renewed interest in literary theory, such as in John Dryden's *An Essay on Dramatic Poesy* (1668), which examines the applicability of classical poetic principles of the ancients to sixteenth and seventeenth century French and English drama. Although the connection is not often considered, psychological-philosophical rhetoric, as illustrated in George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), also relates to theories of drama in extending the purpose of oratory to include informing, entertaining, and exciting the passions. While Campbell is best known for expanding the scope of rhetoric in the area of moral reasoning, like Cicero and Quintilian, Campbell also connects rhetoric with drama, wit, and tragedy. He uses examples from drama in his discussions of both wit and humor and exciting pity and fear in an audience.⁵ As an outgrowth of the eighteenth-century love of wit and criticism, the Belletristic movement aimed to join the study of rhetoric with literature, the fine arts, crafts, aesthetics, painting, architecture, drama, art, and history—in effect, all of the disciplines concerned with taste, style, and criticism.⁶ A

⁵ On wit and humor, Campbell gives detailed examples from the stage and literature, citing Cervantes, Shakespeare, Congreve, and Farquhar as excelling in comedy, but he describes the practice of English comedy in which “obscenity is made too often to supply the place of wit, and ribaldry the place of humour” (161). Of theatrical tragedy, Campbell states that its emotional impact on the audience is that the performance of sorrow is almost like reality but the pity and fear is softened because the audience knows the depiction is not real (240).

⁶ Influenced by Longinus' *On the Sublime*, belletrism was first seen in Great Britain in the lectures of Adam Smith, which took examples from literature as forms and models for rhetorical style and eloquence. In his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1748), Smith writes “we must imagine ourselves not the actors but the spectators of our own character and conduct” (Golden and Corbett 12). Taste in art was a major concern of belletristic theory. David Hume's “Of the Standard of Taste” (1757) posits that standards of taste are universal, but particular tastes about beauty are individual. Thus we must rely on ideal critics, who are experienced in judging a particular art form and *touchstones*, or works of beauty and art that have stood the test of time and are generally agreed to be great. The principles of taste were further applied to rhetoric by Hugh Blair who was known equally as a rhetorician and a literary critic. In his *Lectures on*

primary (and to-date under studied) source on the connection between belletristic rhetoric and drama is the three final lectures of Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, which he devotes to the rhetoric of drama with a particular focus on the tragedy and comedy of classical Greece and Rome, early modern France, and post-restoration England.

Undoubtedly, the most direct theoretical ties between rhetoric and drama in the eighteenth century are found in the elocutionary movement and its emphasis on delivery.⁷ Elocutionary theorists, such as playwright Charles Gildon and former actor Thomas Sheridan, embraced the canon of delivery as the main pursuit of rhetoric and posited that the rhetorician should be trained in voice and body control to achieve the most persuasive and effective oratory.⁸ As noted by Rochelle Glen, Gildon's *The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton (1710)* "is devoted to rules for the stage that can also be applied to the bar and pulpit" (101). Despite its title, Gildon's work is not a biography of Betterton but rather a lively and engaging study of how to portray human passion through gesture, facial expression, and voice. In addition to many examples of the great actors of the Restoration stage, Gildon also gives examples of Greek and Roman playwrights, actors,

Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, Blair calls taste "the power of receiving pleasure from the beauties of nature and art" and says that taste is a natural sensibility that is improved and perfected by reason(10).

⁷ In the eighteenth century, the classical term *elecutio* was transformed into the modern English term *elocution*, and its meaning changed from the classic meaning of style to its modern meaning of delivery.

⁸ Gildon's *The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton (1710)*, actually pre-figures the elocutionary movement in England by some forty years. Further research on Gildon, who was an Irishman, could provide a link between seventeenth century French elocutionary practices and the eighteenth century elocutionary movement in England.

and orators, noting that “Players in Athens were... so highly esteem’d, that they were ...the Masters to two of the most noble and glorious Orators that ever Greece or Rome produc’d”—meaning Demosthenes and Cicero (20). In his *Lectures on Elocution* (1763), Sheridan argues that speech does not consist of words alone but also a speaker’s ability to use tone and gesture to communicate passion and humor; and he compares the use of this ability to a well-acted comedy (888). Sheridan describes language as the “sensible marks” by which communication takes place, not just mere words but also tones and gestures, which are the “true signs of passions” and which reveal “the emotions of the mind” (883-884). Sheridan further justifies the claim, first proposed by Cicero and Quintilian, that delivery stands as the most important canon of rhetoric by arguing that the ability to communicate is an essential capacity necessary for the human mind to effectively reason and that this capacity is manifested most fully by the “organ of speech” (886).

Until recently, the elocutionary and belletristic movements were devalued in the field of rhetoric because the psychological-philosophical movement, with its connection to rationalism, empiricism, and traditional masculine forms of thought, dominated rhetorical study. Yet new directions in the rhetoric of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have revived interest in rhetorical delivery as well as the cultural connection between rhetoric, drama, and other literary forms. Two of the most well known twentieth century rhetorical theorists whose methods connect these fields are Kenneth Burke and Wayne Booth. In his *Grammar of Motives*, Burke’s use of the dramatic pentad employs the elements of drama and acting as metaphors for rhetorical communication. But Burke

does not aim for a belletristic joining of rhetoric and drama. Booth, however, does join the study of rhetoric and literature in his *Rhetoric of Fiction* in which he studies narrative from a rhetorical perspective.

In addition to studies in theory, another methodological approach for discovering the relationship between rhetoric and drama is to examine their intersections in the practice of performance. The concept of performance can be viewed as the players' acts of performing on stage, the playwright's act of composing, or the text as a performance by a playwright. Precedence for studying the rhetoric of performance can be seen in a number of present-day works, such as those that examine the didactic functions of classical drama in ancient Greece and Rome where the practices of oratory and drama were both performances of a persuasive nature delivered in public venues to audiences of public citizens. As Murray, Dover, and O'Regan have all pointed out, the comparison between rhetoric and drama is one of the main themes in the comedies of Aristophanes. For example, in the fictionalized dispute between Aeschylus and Euripides in *Frogs* about what makes good drama, one of the few points the characters agree on is that "the poet's role is didactic, to instruct the audience, and that drama profoundly affects people's behavior" (Murray xix). In *Clouds*, Aristophanes directly satirizes the study of rhetoric by representing Socrates as the head of an educational institution where a father and son go to learn the "systematic... techniques of persuasion" (Dover 110). As the play progresses, the rhetorical techniques learned by father and son prove ineffective and at odds with successful living. Eventually, Socrates' school is burned down and dismantled. O'Regan states that "every element of the play works together to pair

contemporary rhetorical theory with the generically comic ‘natural’ man” and that “comic man proves immune to speech, responsive only to promptings of the body” (4). Through the body, Aristophanes uses drama to deconstruct rhetoric.

The body is also the key to considering gender in rhetoric and performance. In ancient Greece and Rome, as well as in pre-Restoration England, women were barred from public speaking and female characters were played by male actors, which, in effect, was a means of silencing real females. But the presence of female characters on stage, even though played by male actors, did in some ways allow and necessitate rhetorical exploration of gender issues. Several of Aristophanes’ comedies satirize gender and the female [in]ability to act (in terms of the stage and in the broader sense of taking any decisive action). *Lysistrata*, one of the earliest known comedies to address gender as its major theme, is probably Aristophanes’ most famous gender play. Focusing literally on the battle of the sexes, the characters of *Lysistrata* perform and satirize gender and sexual relationships with bawdy language, innuendo, and props of genitalia exaggerating the stereotypes of Greek male and female sexuality. In *Thesmophoriazusae*, Aristophanes provides another comical and complex commentary on gender and performance. The character of Agathon appears as a “young and effeminate tragic poet...dressed in drag in the very throes of creation” (Murray xvi). Murray cites Agathon’s lines describing how a man writes for a woman’s role: “If he is writing a woman’s actions, he has to participate in her experience, body, and soul” (xvi). Thus, even dating back to Aristophanes, artistic concerns about the female experience are evident.

Moving forward in time to the Renaissance, another famous play written for all-male actors but centering on gender is William Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*. The play centers on the struggle for power and dominance in gendered relationships. Male dominance is the driving force in Petruchio's comically misogynist courtship of Katharina, as well as in the subplot of the other males vying for the affections of Bianca. In the plot action, Shakespeare shows that males have both physical (bodily) power and public intellectual power of patriarchal law on their side while females have only the private intellectual power of their wits and their wiles. Throughout the play, as Petruchio "tames" the shrewish Katharina, the audience witnesses her bodily suffering. She is starved, deprived of sleep, and mistreated by Petruchio until she submits to his will. As the story runs its course, she speaks less and less. Katharina's silence has been read as the female's struggle with and eventual submission to the model of the "femme covert," the early modern tradition of female silence (Dolan 24). Yet Katharina is a female character whose strong personality opposes silence. As Katharina states, "My tongue will tell the anger of my heart, Or else my heart, concealing it, will break. And rather than it shall, I will be free Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words" (IV.III.77-80). In speaking, the character of Katharina opposes patriarchy with an act that is simultaneously of the body and of the mind. Rhetorics of gender always involve the gendered body and the idea of gender imposed by dominant cultural hegemonies, such as that of early modern patriarchy. Furthermore, as shown in the drama of Shakespeare and Aristophanes, precedents for the study of gendered rhetoric in drama and performance exist across many periods of western culture.

My Methods

In this dissertation, I too examine female-focused drama and performance from a rhetorical perspective, but my focus is on Restoration and early eighteenth-century theatre. The primary goal of my study is to recover the theatre of this period as an important, early venue for female/feminist rhetoric. I derive my methodology from several contemporary methods of inquiry, including feminist recovery (for its focus on gender), Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation (for its recognition of both cultural impacts and individual participation), performance study (for its focus on bodily delivery), and Habermas' conception of the public sphere (for its specialized focus on Enlightenment England and for its definitions of public and private). My methodology, then, consists of applying the model of the rhetorical situation to recover rhetorical theory and performance by and about females in the Restoration and early 18th century English theater and to study the reception of this rhetoric by its audience.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I draw on the feminist historical recovery methods developed by Nan Johnson and Lindal Buchanan in their separate studies of nineteenth-century female rhetorical delivery. I am also inspired by methodological influences from the study of rhetorical accretion by Vickie Tolar Collins. Similar to Nan Johnson's approach in *Gender and Rhetorical Space*, my method of recovery involves a multi-pronged analysis, centered on the Restoration and eighteenth-century theater as a *cultural site* that created a broad and ongoing opportunity for female rhetoric. Yet within

this cultural site many actresses and playwrights stand out as speakers—that is, as creators and deliverers—of feminist rhetoric. I must, therefore, also examine some representative sample of individual speakers in context to better understand this rhetoric, as well as its causes and effects. My examination of individual actresses delves into their elocutionary styles, but I also follow Buchanan’s feminist methodology of studying delivery as “a regendered fifth canon [that] addresses far more than the speaker’s manipulation of voice and body on a public platform and instead views rhetorical performance as the moment when dominant cultural values are enacted and, sometimes, are resisted and revised” (160). To conduct a cultural reading of female delivery, Buchanan recommends six topoi: 1) *education*—how the rhetor is educated in delivery, 2) *access* to public platforms, 3) *space* or how audiences’ perceive a rhetor on stage and how the rhetor uses and mitigates these perceptions, 4) *genre* and its accessibility and taboos in relation to gender, 5) *body* language and gendered physical attributes involved in delivery, and 6) *rhetorical career* or how particular groups of women become involved in public speaking and how their rhetorical careers impact their lives (160 -163).

Buchanan’s topoi are natural and fitting in the study of Restoration and early eighteenth-century actresses as purveyors of rhetoric delivery. Another feminist methodology that is useful to my study Collin’s method of examining rhetorical accretion, or the layering of intended meanings that occurs in the reception of texts and how texts are appropriated by others, such as publishers and critics. When applied to the female rhetoric in Restoration and early eighteenth century theater, rhetorical accretion can be located in the speaker’s performance, a process that begins with the artistic inspirations of playwrights in

developing scripts and roles (inspirations that , as I will show, the playwright often explicitly ties to the personalities of the actresses themselves), then moves to the actress' interpretation and delivery of the role, and finally to the audience's interpretive reception and playback of the role in performance. These recently developed methodologies, by Johnson, Buchanan, and Collins, offer a wealth of perspective to help me explore and reconcile the cultural and individual aspects of historical female rhetoric.

To further capture both the wide significance of cultural contexts impacting the theater and the more focused contributions of individual speakers, I turn to twentieth-century rhetorical theorist Lloyd Bitzer's model of the rhetorical situation. Like Johnson and Buchanan, Bitzer is very much concerned with the contexts of rhetoric. According to Bitzer, the rhetorical situation consists of "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations" responding to an *exigence* or "an imperfection marked by urgency...a defect, an obstacle, or something waiting to done," which can be removed or, more likely, improved through the means of discourse delivered by a speaker to an audience who has the power to mediate change (Bitzer 304). The five constituents of Bitzer's model of the rhetorical situation are 1) *exigence* (or defect), 2) *audience*, 3) *constraints* (persons, events, objects, and relations, which are part of the situation), 4) *speaker*, and 5) the *speech* itself (304-306). For my study, I will simplify Bitzer's model to four components: *speaker, audience, message, and context*. Figure 1.1 compares Bitzer's model to mine:

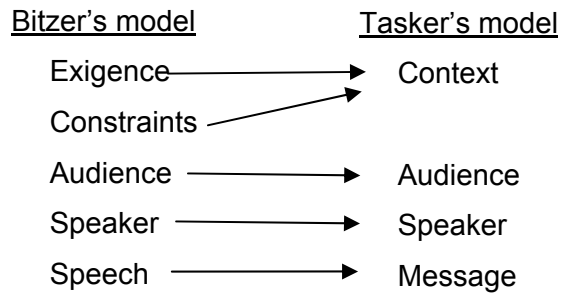


Figure 1.1: Two models of the Rhetorical Situation

As Figure 1.1 shows, in my model, *context* refers to both exigencies (the circumstances that prompt the speaker to speak) and constraints (or external circumstances, such as the physical environment and the audience's prior knowledge, prejudices and predispositions). I also replace *speech* with *message*, which, for theater, I connote as both text and performance. My rhetorical model of the Restoration and early eighteenth century theater appears in Figure 1.2 below.

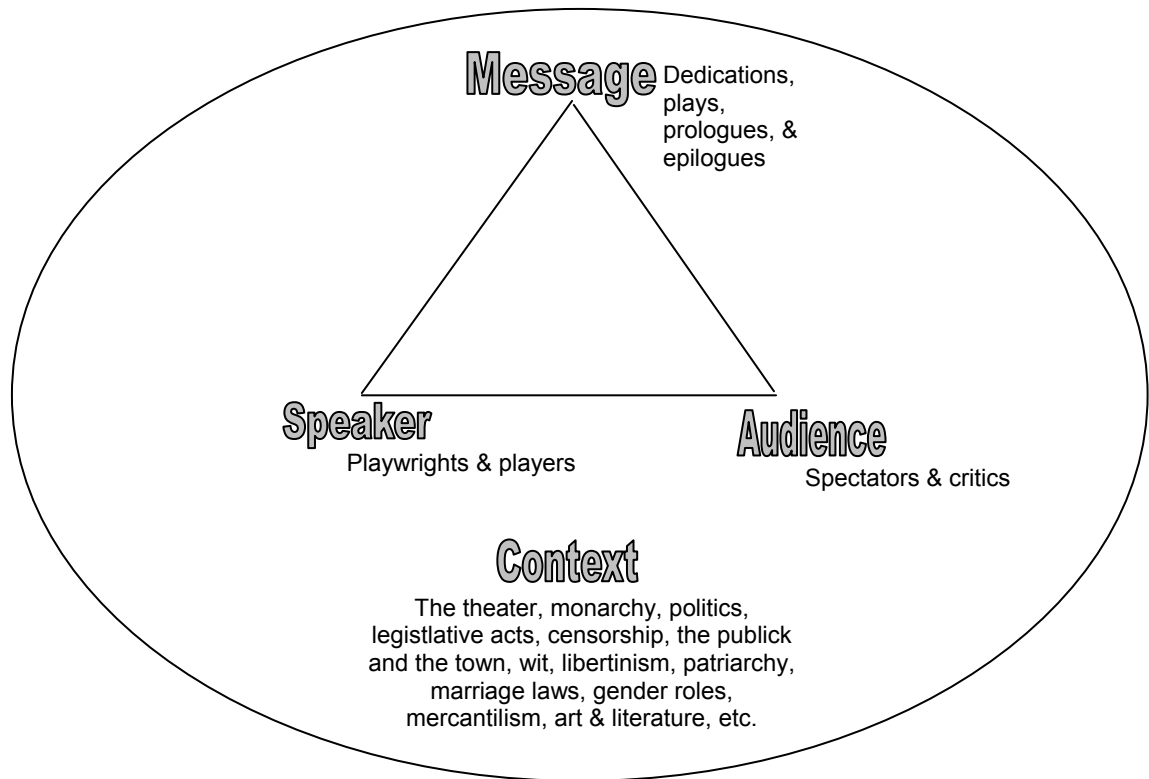


Figure 1.2: Restoration and Early Eighteenth-century Theater as Rhetorical Situation

As shown in Figure 1.2, the Restoration and early eighteenth-century theater can be viewed as a venue enacting all the components of the rhetorical situation. In the physical, political, social, and economic *context* of the theater in London, *speakers* (who consisted of both playwrights and players) performed *messages* in the forms of plays, prologues, and epilogues before an *audience* of Londoners and, perhaps, visitors to the city. As shall be seen, women participated in and influenced all components (*context*, *speaker*, *audience*, and *message*) of this very public rhetorical venue.

The *context* included the physical space of the theater, as well as the elements of the society surrounding the theater, including the monarchy, government, and legislation; the patriarchal family, marriage, and primogeniture; the church; inherent social institutions of the town, such as local customs, class structures, the arts, and the mood of the emerging general public. Another major factor in the social climate was the uncertain status of women. Cynthia Lowenthal reads the historic context of the Restoration and early-eighteenth century theater as place where unstable bodies in motion are inextricably linked to “questions of status and gender, definitions of Englishness, and even what it meant to be a person in the late seventeenth century” (4). Lowenthal further links the theatrical context to the larger context of late seventeenth-century society in which, among other developments, “increased knowledge drawn from a burgeoning ‘news’ and print culture...supported the production of the first celebrity culture” (6). The prominence of “the media” and celebrity culture today gives us a common ground for understanding those elements in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Both then and now, the contexts of the theater and the media have created rhetorical situations around popular subjects of the culture in which they exist.

Another key component of rhetorical situations formed in the Restoration theaters were the *speakers*—the teams of players and playwrights whose drama and performance provided not only entertainment but rhetorical *messages*, which were communicated to the theater-going *audience*. The *speaker* in theatrical performance consists of an amalgam of all persons involved in delivering the message, including the writer(s) of the play, prologue, epilogue, and any song or verse recited upon the stage and any actor or

actress who speaks or gestures there. Drama as rhetorical situation is always marked by a *double speaker*; in essence, at any given point in the performance, the speaker is the combination of the writer who wrote the particular piece of text being performed and the players who are performing it. In the case of the Restoration and eighteenth-century theater, female roles are most often constituted of a male+female speaker; that is, the male playwright and the female actress. A number of female playwrights also produced plays in this period; thereby creating in female roles the double female speaker.

In dramatic performance, playwrights and players are inextricably bound to each other as one constitutive speaker who is, as the messenger, also closely bound to the *message*. In addition to the verbal rhetoric originating in the script, the acting half of the dramatic speaker also adds visual rhetoric to the *message*, through expressions, gestures, and movements, as well as through costume, makeup, and interaction with props. As Peter Holland notes, “[t]he actor’s intervention becomes not simply an available vehicle to be combined with the dramatist’s purpose but the essence of that purpose” and “in themselves the actors can constitute a new possibility of form” (81). Actors and actresses in their performances are not only speakers but part of the message. In the case of the Restoration actress, for example, Howe cites the “whorish, fickle, and sexually available” persona of the actress as a huge influence on the comedy written between 1660 and 1700. Actresses did constitute new forms, in both character type and dramatic genre, as I shall show in chapters 2, 3, and 4.

Of course, the *message* is also strongly shaped through the textual elements of performance, including the play scripts, prologues, and epilogues, as well as published

dedications and a variety of critical publications surrounding a play. In addition to plot, dialog, and character, play scripts convey a rhetorical message through genre. In terms of genre, the vast majority of Restoration and early-eighteenth century plays typically fall into the general categories of tragedy or comedy. Many theater historians have noted that most of the common sub-genres of the period, including Comedy of Manners, She Tragedies, Humane Comedies, and Breeches Comedies, held gender roles as their primary concern (Marsden, Staves, Howe). Almost without exception, the message in Restoration and early-eighteenth century drama dealt with heavily contested views about the status, capabilities, and the moral character of the female. The reciprocal impact between female actresses and genre over the course of 1660 to 1737 is very strong and highly rhetorical. I describe the rhetorical impacts between actresses and genres in my general discussions of performance and in my discussion of individual actresses throughout chapters two, three, and four.

While rhetorical messages within dramatic genres are generally indirect, other texts associated with a play contain forms of direct address. Many Restoration plays were published with a Dedication from the author offered to a named patron. The dedication was not read at performances but would accompany the written publication of the play. Some dedications are sprinkled with direct statements of rhetorical theory by the author, such as in Aphra Behn's dedication of *The Lucky Chance* in which she says that plays are "secret Instructions to the People, in things that 'tis impossible to insinuate into them any other Way" (*Works* 183). This passage is cited often in anthologies of rhetorical and literary theory.

Two other important forms of a direct address to the audience were the prologues and epilogues, which were spoken by particular actors and actresses proceeding and following the plays. The purpose of the prologue was to make appeals to the audience. Cibber suggests that a large purpose of the prologue was subtle, soothing, and smoothly executed ridicule, and he states: “To speak a good Prologue well, is, in my Opinion, one of the hardest Parts, and strongest Proofs of sound Elocution” (158). Cibber’s implication is that delivering a prologue was much like delivering a speech; the actor was not playing a character so much as speaking directly to the audience.

The gendering of prologues and epilogues was a very popular practice, and women were often called upon to speak them. As Montague Summers notes:

The poets often endeavored to give an extra spice and savour to their prologues and epilogues by entrusting the delivery of the addresses to a young girl. It appears ...especially piquant that wanton rhymes should be pronounced by lips which if not innocent were at any rate tender and bland, and a smutty jest was winged with far livelier point if given with seeming simplicity and ingenuous artlessness (178).

Many prologue and epilogues, especially those written for the actresses, were rife with sexual innuendo and double entendre and often contained body references and allusions to prostitution. Epilogues often served as a defense of the play or the author’s motivations or sometimes a commentary on the London society. Of epilogues, Summers states that cast members, including an array of beautiful actresses, would remain onstage

while an actor or actress delivered it (181). In the actresses' delivery of sexually suggestive prologues and epilogues, life and art mingled. As noted by Howe, many actresses "lightheartedly reinforced the idea of themselves as whores, corroborating, as it were, what the satirists and the gossips said about them" (98). By enacting provocative speeches directly to the audience, these women perpetuated the image of the actress as a sexual commodity.

The characteristics of the *audience* and their reception of these performances is another important component in the study of the Restoration and early-eighteenth century theater as a rhetorical situation. First-hand descriptions of the audience and their responses to specific performances are preserved in a variety of primary sources, as well as in reliable secondary compilations. First-hand reactions to the performances of the period have been preserved in letters, diaries, newspapers, and other contemporary publications from such writers as Samuel Pepys, Gerard Langbaine, Colley Cibber, Jeremy Collier, and Charles Gildon. The diaries of Samuel Pepys are well known as invaluable artifacts of late seventeenth-century culture. The theater histories by Langbaine and Cibber both provide enthusiastic contemporary accounts of the performances a few decades after Pepys. As Evans notes in his introduction to *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian*, Cibber's biography offers "a reasonably accurate history...of one of the great eras of English theater, from 1660 to 1737" and is valuable as "an account written from first or second-hand experiences." (xxxviii). Gildon's *Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton* (1710) provides another positive, detailed account of Restoration acting and early elocutionary theory. Like Cibber's

Apology, Gildon's account carries authority by virtue of Gildon's first, or in some cases, second hand experience of performances. Collier's *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, a diatribe condemning many playwrights and what Collier sees as immoral plays, provides a representative counterpoint to Langbaine and Cibber. From these sources and others, theater historians have surmised that Restoration and early-eighteenth century theater audiences consisted of a mixed-gender crowd, mostly upper classes, but servants and some middle class as well.⁹ All accounts emphasize that females of a variety of social classes were part of the audience. The rhetorical situation of the live performance on the Restoration stage with its large apron area jutting out into the audience afforded immediate feedback from spectators and was therefore highly interactive. In addition, the theatrical venue also generated other ongoing audience responses to performances in the form of critical reviews and essays, as well as private and semi-private critiques in written correspondence and conversations at other venues, such as restaurants, parties, coffee houses, and other gathering places.

Another lens for considering theater audiences of the period is through Jurgen Habermas' notion of the emergence of a bourgeois public in the early eighteenth century, which he states is "constituted by private people putting reason to use" publicly (xviii; 1).¹⁰ According to Habermas, the simultaneous evolution of political structures,

⁹ Chapters 2, 3, and 4 describe the composition of the audience during the various sub-periods of my study. See also, William Van Lennep's *The London Stage: 1660 – 1800*, Peter Holland's *The Ornament of Action*, and Montague Summer's *The Restoration Stage*.

¹⁰ According to Habermas, the modern public sphere is the result of a transformation, essentially a swapping of meaning, of the classical Greek conception of the public sphere as "a realm of freedom and permanence" and the private sphere as "the realm of necessity and transitoriness" (3-4).

commercial institutions, and development of the press as a facility for reaching a broad readership, had transformed the public, which was in effect both creating and decomposing itself. This decomposition is marked by an economic praxis emerging from households into the public arena, resulting in a loss of freedom and a growing instability in the public sphere. While Habermas states that this transformation does and will occur whenever these modernizing conditions are met—that is when a society becomes an industrialized, social-welfare state—the first time and place that these developments occurred was during the Enlightenment in eighteenth-century England, particularly after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 (37). As Habermas notes, “the same process that converted culture into a commodity...established the public” (37). Habermas’ significance to my study is twofold: first, theatre audiences were representative of this new public sphere, and, secondly, actresses were part of the cultural commodity consumed by this new public. The actress was the currency by which Restoration and early eighteenth century theater-goers considered rhetorical factors of the decomposing society. As evidence, plays of this period are generally focused on and critical of patriarchy, almost always depicting it as a flawed system, often collapsing and even failed—an institution for clever characters to circumvent or use for their own gain. Forced marriage dictated by patriarchal arrangement is universally depicted as an enslaving cultural institution with ultimately little benefit for either gender. And, chastity is often portrayed as a curse that most characters, even virgins, despise. At the other extreme, the prostitute stands as a symbolic threat of what females can expect from life without the protection of a male-headed family. Habermas’ theory of the transformation

of modern culture helps capture both the materialism and the anxiety of theater audiences at the turn of the seventeenth into the eighteenth century. Numerous references in plays of the period to females as a commodity of patriarchy support the applicability of Habermas' economic reading of late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century culture from a theatrical point of view.

Another critical methodology that offers a material—actually a corporeal—reading of females and feminism in Restoration and eighteenth century theater is that of performance theory, such as Judith Butler's writing on gender and performance and Jean Marsden's and Cynthia Lowenthal's books that apply performance theory specifically to the late seventeenth and early-eighteenth century British theatre. Theater historians have long described Restoration drama as a drama of performance; thus, Butler's theories on the performance of gender are valuable means for considering displays and destabilizations of gender in Restoration theatre. In an extension of Derrida's concept of the performative, Butler proposes that "we understand 'sex' and 'gender' as citation repetitions" of dominant cultural identities" (Leitch 2486). In these terms, gender is not only performance but a playback of cultural identity. Butler also posits that the body is "a surface whose permeability is politically regulated" and that "[G]endered bodies are so many 'styles of flesh'," and " 'an act,' ... which is both intentional and performative." (25499-2500). Butler's notion of the body is highly applicable to the stylized milieu of the Restoration stage, a space in which female ascension to the spotlights signals a new "style of flesh" and the radical regendering of performative meaning. Furthermore, as Butler notes, "the various acts of gender create the idea of gender," but gender is an act

that “[a]s in other ritual social dramas...requires a performance that is repeated. This repetition is at once socially established;...becoming stylized into gendered modes” (2500). Thus, although actresses were new on the Restoration stage, they served to re-instantiate received notions of femaleness, to perform the public image of the female gender.

The actress as paradox of gender, an innovation and re-instantiation of performed cultural identity, is a theme played out over and over again throughout the periods of this study. The actresses’ bodies as performances of gender had immediate visual impact and deep-seated rhetorical affects on the audiences. As Marsden writes,

The actress was recognizably female, with her breasts, loosened hair, and frequently revealed legs, all signs of womanhood emphasized in the roles she played. These physical signs not only established the actress’s sex, but also linked her to other women, especially those sitting in the theater. This seeming equation between the image of woman on the stage and the woman in the audience becomes a source of cultural anxiety, especially...because the representation of women cannot be separated from a representation of their sexuality (4).

Actresses brought a bodily authenticity to female performance. As Paul Goring notes, “flesh can bestow authority through the persuasive rhetoric of ‘nature’” (19). The actress, with her onstage bodily authority, created a physical bond between the female speaker and the female spectator. The implicit bond between female performers and the

female audience was something new in London society and quickly became a source of public anxiety. Public performance by females amounted to a bodily intrusion into the male sphere, a physical violation, a shock. As Lowenthal states, “During the Restoration, ...bodies were valorized when they were aristocratic, male, and Protestant, while the most intensely performative, aggressively veiled, and oft ‘discovered’ bodies were always those of women” (19). The anxious audience sees and hears the female performers, and their ideas of femaleness are challenged and influenced by what they see.

Performance theory is also useful in tying textual, oratorical, and visual rhetorics together to examine the relationships of speaker/subject/gazer and audience/object/gazed upon. For example, the stereotype of the low moral estate of the Restoration actress as a “working girl” who existed outside the prescribed social order might have eased the audiences’ gaze into the comic mirror of their own society and its anxieties about females in relation to patriarchy. If the audience viewed the actress as a creature who stood outside the social order, then they could watch her as a simultaneously glamorized and devalued object far distanced from the girl next store. But, as the audience gazed in judgment on an actress, she gazed back. One of the interesting subversions of the Restoration theater, with its well-lit and intimate space, is the reverse gaze from actor to audience. Marsden writes, the “gaze...could be wielded by the actress herself, as demonstrated in numerous prologues and epilogues” (10). Douglas Canfield concurs. In the conclusion of his introduction to *The Broadway Anthology of Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century Drama*, Canfield says of Restoration actresses, “They were not just objectified by the gaze of the audience...; in their reciting of prologues and epilogues, in

their asides, and merely in their making eye contact with the audience, they conveyed their personalities and enacted their own gaze of agency,” which included “roles of significant agency, from queens to more private women of powerful passion and intelligence” (xix). In live performance, especially in a setting intimate enough to afford eye contact between speaker and audience, the performer engenders her own agency, an act that is both rhetorical and dramatic.

Yet, despite the instantiation of gendered performance, the gender identities prescribed by the dominant culture cannot entirely control individual behavior. Gender is not truly binary but rather infinitely complex. As Butler points out, even as performance instantiates gender norms, it can also subvert the status quo and allow new identities to emerge (Leitch 2486). Individuals, with their small contributions of uniqueness, insinuate new meanings into their performances, and, even while upholding and furthering stereotypes, they influence changes in gender images. Butler is a known advocate of parody and drag performances as a means to destabilize the identity traps that culture imposes (Leitch 2487). In examining the Restoration actresses, we must also look at how their performances both instantiate and destabilize gender and how this constitutes an act of persuasion by the speaker upon the audience. For example, obvious subversions of gender are accomplished in the performative practice of cross-dressing on stage and through the character types and delivery styles that accompany this practice. The classical delivery style that Amy Richlin and others have described as Asiatic, with its tendency toward a feminized flamboyance, is clearly revived in the neoclassical London theatres of the Restoration and eighteenth century. Considerations of masculinity versus

femininity in delivery style are keenly examined in a variety of character types, such as the fop and the female libertine, as I shall discuss in upcoming chapters. Destabilizations of gender abound in Restoration and eighteenth century theatre in character types such as the rake, the fop, the female rake, and the breeches role. Presentations of gender evolve and devolve over the span of 1660 to 1737, reflecting the changing political and social contexts of the period.

Theatrical Sub-periods

In analyzing London theater from 1660 to 1737, it is useful to categorize the period into three sub-periods, which reflect specific political events: Restoration drama from 1660 to 1688, Post-restoration drama from 1688 to 1714, and Early Georgian drama from 1714 to 1737.¹¹ The sub-period of Restoration drama coincides with the ascendancy of Charles II of the House of Stuart in 1660 until his death in 1685 and also includes the rule of his Catholic brother James II, which ended when James was dethroned in 1688. The Post-restoration sub-period of drama begins in 1688, the year of the Glorious (or bloodless) Revolution in which Charles' protestant daughter, Mary, and her husband, the Dutch William of Orange, peacefully ascended to the throne. The Post-restoration period lasts through their rule, which ended in 1702, and continues through

¹¹ Editor Douglas Canfield uses these divisions in *The Broadview Anthology of Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century Drama* except that he terms the middle period Revolutionary Drama, which I think causes confusion with the earlier period of the English civil war when Cromwell came to power. Other theater historians, such as Montague Summers and Peter Holland, distinguish the theatrical periods somewhat vaguely primarily between the Restoration, the early eighteenth century, and the early Hanoverian reign. In essence, the Restoration of 1660 and the licensing act of 1737 are common book ends for the period, and the shifts in monarchical power provide the transitional phases within the larger period.

the rule of Mary's sister Anne, the last of the Stuart monarchs, from 1702 to 1714. The Early Georgian sub-period of drama covers the early period of the Hanoverian rule, marked by the monarchies of George I (1714-1727) and George II (1727-1760). Many theater historians end this period of drama in 1737 due to the licensing act of that year, which effectively curtailed dramatic production, enacted greater censorship and was one of the contributing factors, along with decreasing demand, to the curtailing of new play production. This division of dramatic sub-periods is helpful in grouping the plays, playwrights, and players according to the changing political contexts that impacted the theatre, dramatic composition, and performance. Female and feminist rhetoric in the plays, prologues and epilogues, dedications, critical reviews, and other related materials from all of these periods reflect the changes in political and social context.

The sub-periods are reflected in chapters two through four of this dissertation: chapter 2 describes Restoration drama, chapter 3 moves to Post-restoration drama, and chapter 4 covers Early Georgian drama. In each of these sub-periods, I examine the rhetorical situation surrounding the theatre: the contexts, the characteristics and relationships of the playwrights and players who together constitute the speaker; the audience and the critics, and the message, including the rhetorical characteristics of the dominant genres, character types, and other devices used to display female and feminist rhetoric. In each chapter, I also devote a large section to discussing the rhetorical contributions of individual actresses. Throughout all chapters, I focus on how the various aspects of the performative rhetorical situation pertain to gender.

FINDING VOICE: FEMALE RHETORIC ON THE RESTORATION STAGE

In 1660, an English people wearied by civil war, the austerity of Puritan rule, and the ambiguity of an English state without a monarch, restored Charles II of the House of Stuart to the throne. Charles had been exiled, mostly in France but also in Holland, for eighteen years ever since the imprisonment and execution of his father Charles I. During the interregnum in England, by order of Parliament, the public theaters remained closed. Shortly after his restoration, French-educated Charles II approved the formation of two new public theater companies, which were chartered and sponsored by the royal government for the first time in British history. This legislation effectively created an exclusive theater monopoly for the King's company, headed by Thomas Killigrew, and the Duke's company, headed by William Davenant.¹² Londoners eagerly flocked to see performances by the new companies. As Colley Cibber states, the King's and Duke's theatre companies "were both in high Estimation with the Publick, and so much the Delight and Concern of the Court, that they were ... supported by its being frequently present at their publick Presentations" (54). Thus, the Restoration theatre had both governmental and popular support. The earliest performances of the Restoration were revivals—of Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Johnson. But before long, the

¹² For the circumstances that led King Charles II to grant to Killigrew and Davenant exclusive theater charters, as well as the policies and procedures governing the charters, see Van Lennep, Howe, or the biographical entries for Killigrew and Davenant in Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, Burnim, and Langhans.

period saw new playwrights, new plays, innovative sets, and new technologies.¹³ What the audiences found more striking than any of these was the innovation of the actress.

The first professional actress appeared on the English stage in the last months of 1660, possibly in *Othello* in the role of Desdemona (Howe 19). Although the identity of the first actress to perform in the London public theaters is not known, theatrical records of the period show that both the King's and Dukes' companies acquired a number of actresses that year. Citing figures from *The London Stage*, Howe reports that, in 1660, Davenant recruited six actresses: Hester Davenport, Mary Saunderson, Jane Long, Anne Gibbs, Mrs. Jennings, and Mrs. Norris; and Killigrew recruited at least four: Katherine Corey, Anne Marshall, Mrs. Eastland, and Mrs. Weaver (24). Between the two companies, not more than a dozen actresses were signed that first season. Some of the better known of the earliest actresses were Moll Davis, who became a mistress of Charles II, Mary Saunderson, and the Marshall sisters, Anne and Rebecca (Howe 25; Pope 30-31). At once actresses became popular public figures, but their social status as public females was far from exalted. As Howe points out, this new public profession for women made them "in one sense merely playthings for a small male elite"(front piece). Actresses were disdained in the public eye and collectively denounced as prostitutes, or at least as women of dubious morals. The underlying reasons for the association of actresses with prostitution pre-date the Restoration by centuries. As King and Rabil note,

¹³ Innovations included the new system of theater monopolies, women playing female parts, a new design for pit and box seating, and the development of a longer program with the inclusion of interact entertainment. New technologies included moveable and changeable scenery, as well as artificial lighting (*The London Stage* xxii; Munns 84; Canfield xviii-xix).

the dominant patriarchal perception throughout Europe during the Renaissance was that “excessive speech [in women] was an indication of unchastity. By speech, women seduced men” (xxviii). Thus, public speaking for women was akin to a public sex act. Yet, as unchaste as female acting seemed to Londoners in the seventeenth century, they also found it exciting. Actresses aroused tremendous fascination as public individuals. As Cynthia Lowenthal states, “we need only recall Pepys’ enthusiastic responses to ‘my Lady Castlemaine’ or the gossip surrounding Nell Gwyn’s liaison with the king to see just how quickly and powerfully the women players became objects of both specularization and speculation” (220). But actresses were more than just objects to be watched. In taking up their professions, actresses inadvertently formed an officially mandated female contingent that, by its very public existence, challenged the notion that the public sphere was available only to men.

Though they fell outside the prescribed social structure of the patriarchy in which they lived, Restoration actresses were official members of their society. The original female members of the Kings’ and the Duke’s companies were all “sworn servants of the king” (Howe 25). Within two years of his Restoration, Charles made the profession of the actress even more official. In a royal patent issued in 1662, Charles officially decreed that female parts would now be played by women¹⁴:

Forasmuch as...the women’s parts...have been
acted by men in the habits of women, at which

¹⁴ In the early 1660s, men, such as Edward Kynaston, continued to play women’s roles, but the royal patent of 1662 effectively shut the door for male actors who specialized in female roles.

some have taken offence,... we do... permit and give
 leave that all the women's parts to be acted in either
 of the...two companies from this time to come may
 be performed by women. (quoted in Styan 90)

As Styan notes, "Charles cleverly...argued that it was just as offensive for the male sex to wear skirts as it was for the female sex to display itself in public" (89-90). Charles' 1662 decree certainly was one of the defining events for women in Restoration society.

Thanks to Charles, the Restoration actress was born to the public; however, Charles' agenda was hardly public equality for women; it was more likely to reinvigorate London's long dormant artistic scene and to feed his famous taste for attractive ladies by having them perform on stage.

In addition to the 1662 patent, a range of other cultural factors in the latter part of the seventeenth century contributed to the emergence of the actress. Howe suggests that "a profound change in contemporary attitudes to women [and] female sexuality," as well as the recognition of women as private individuals and the merging of court theatre and public theater into one entity were all contributing factors (21-22). Yet, as Howe points out, women became recognized as *private*, not *public*, individuals. Thus, actresses as performers in the public theaters appropriated a rhetorical space that fell outside the margins of respectability. Staves offers even broader explanations to account for the public's acceptance of actresses and female-centered themes in the theater: first, she cites the protestant insistence of equality for all humans; secondly, she points to the growing view of marriage as a contract between two individuals; and, thirdly, she suggests that

deep political and cultural changes were creating a more bourgeois flavor of patriarchy, which disdained the use of personal violence and sought to appropriate symbols and behaviors of non-violence from femininity (155-156). These underlying cultural exigencies helped shape a public that was, at least in part, receptive to females on stage. In turn, the public presence of the actress allowed a rhetorical response reflective of deep anxieties about female identity in Restoration society.

Actresses' performances did not directly represent their own political views and causes; they were acting the parts written for them by the playwrights. But the more experienced and talented actresses must have known that, beyond their surface mission of entertaining and titillating, they had some stake in and influence on the content of the message. Actresses were granted the power to symbolize the female sex and the themes that confronted it, but inherent in that symbolism was sexual objectification. In describing the double-edged situation of the actress on the Restoration stage, Harold Weber states that "the emergence of female players provides possibly the best example of how sexual change could both elevate and degrade women at the same time" (151). Howe echoes this view as well, citing the Restoration's cynical portrayal of male-female relationships as "a consequence of a changed approach to characterization that the sexual exploitation of the actress made necessary" (62-65). Actresses were a living irony—the embodiment of female independence and male desire.

But, overall, the infusion of actresses into the London theater gave greater exposure to the material circumstances of women's lives and inspired playwrights to more realistically explore and dramatize social relationships between the sexes.

Nowhere else in Restoration society (save perhaps on the pulpits of Protestant sects like the Quakers) did common females speak to a large public audience. As such, the actress on stage became a vehicle for exploring questions about femaleness, such as: What did London society think about the purpose, status, and condition of women? Should the female voice be heard? Given the chance to speak, could women be rhetorically effective? Was dramatic performance by women dangerous to spectators? With actresses performing female parts in a slew of newly-written plays to a mixed-gender audience on the public stage, the Restoration theatre put the spotlight on these questions. Like never before and never since in English history, the actress was the center of the theater throughout the Restoration and much of the Post-Restoration era—from the ascension of Charles II in 1660, throughout his reign and that of his brother, James, and even after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and into the first decade of the eighteenth century.

The Female Question

At the time of the Restoration, the age-old debate of the *querelle des femmes* (or “women question”) was still far from settled.¹⁵ Heavily contested views about the status and capabilities of women were quite serious and had been debated for centuries, since medieval times. Even though the old authority of the restored monarchy reasserted its power and the traditional patriarchal system remained entrenched, by the late seventeenth

¹⁵ For an excellent introduction to the historical *querelle des femmes* in western culture, see King and Rabil’s introduction to *The Other Voice in Early Modern Literature* series.

century, feminist undercurrents were palpable. But adverse reactions to the softly growing voice of women were strong. Nowhere is this more evident than in the radical redefinition of the meaning of marriage.¹⁶ As many scholars have pointed out, marriage during the Restoration and the eighteenth century went through a series of legislative acts that transformed it from a holy union and religious rite to a social contract open to legal modification (Anderson, Weber, Collins, Staves). In 1653, during the anti-catholic period of the interregnum, Parliament enacted laws to define marriage as a civil union. Charles II, upon regaining the throne in 1660, abolished these marriage laws but did not redefine the meaning of marriage, which remained in a state of confusion until 1753 when new laws defining marriage were finally enacted.¹⁷ In reality, the laws on marriage, wealth, and ownership did not impact the majority of the population. Anderson notes that, even as late as the 1750s, over 80 percent of the population still had annual incomes of “£49 or less;” only the wealthiest three percent of the population had incomes over £200; and “very little wealth was transferred at the time of marriage” (59). Likewise, the problems of aristocratic marriages, primogeniture, and inheritance depicted on stage were not common problems for most people at that time. But women as a group

¹⁶ Both Misty Anderson and Margo Collins provide detailed and insightful analyses of the legislation of marriage acts in seventeenth and eighteenth century England impacted drama. Anderson’s *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the London Stage* undertakes a comprehensive of understanding of the relationship between the evolving meaning of marriage in the seventeenth and eighteenth century and Restoration comedy. In “Centlivre v. Hardwicke: Susannah Centlivre’s Plays and the Marriage Act of 1753,” Collins uses the legal history of marriage as a tool for analyzing the plays of Susannah Centlivre.

¹⁷ Anderson’s review of the changing laws of the seventeenth and eighteenth century concludes that the newer laws, in fact, lessened the financial claims of women because the underlying assumption of society, which the new laws put into writing, were that, through marriage, women gave up their rights to own property and rendered themselves legally subordinate to men (chapter 2).

certainly ran a high risk for financial difficulties. With the exception of widows, a woman during this period would have a very difficult time acquiring property, and, in effect, a single woman could not own a business. If a woman appeared wealthy and successful without a known family connection, a likely conclusion was that she must have been selling herself. The values and social possibilities inherent in patriarchy continued to imply that a respectable, financially-independent woman unconnected to a male and his fortune was an impossibility. Yet, during the Restoration and early eighteenth century, women's access and relationship to wealth was a major theme in the theater. As Anderson notes, one of the great "attractions of stage comedy include[d] the fantastic identification of the audience with the witty and wealthy" characters depicted on stage (Anderson 59). Like audiences today, Restoration spectators appear to have had a vicarious fascination with the lifestyle of the rich. The theater played to the audience by indulging their fantasies and providing an exaggerated social critique of wealth and aristocratic culture.

Indeed, fashionable society in the Restoration period, particularly powerful individuals of the King's court, wielded a strong influence on what was popular in art. Their views on courtship and romance had the effect of creating a cynical artistic mood that Staves characterizes as "antiheroic" (155). This cynicism may have resulted partially as a reaction by Restoration dramatists to Hobbesian philosophy, which characterized individuals as innately selfish and competitive and partially as a reaction to the mode of courtly love. John Harrington Smith describes the mood in the drama of the period as a tension between the platonic and anti-platonic. As Smith notes, the platonic mode, which

had come into vogue with the Carolinean court and the court masques of Charles' mother, Queen Henrietta Marie, was challenged in the Restoration by a powerful group of young male wits who were in favor with Charles II and who comprised a "non-respectable element" at court that "took delight in jeering" at the platonic mode of the older generation (34). This tension created the conditions for depicting a new kind of irreverent romantic comedy and also, later, a tendency toward a libertine type of misogyny. Both platonic and anti-platonic modes of drama hinge on interactions between the sexes and both serve to focus the audience's gaze on the female who becomes not only the object of the gaze but also the central focus of the drama.

Restoration Audiences and Critics

Restoration drama drew a loyal body of spectators. On average, the audience attending a performance at one of the two Restoration theaters consisted of about 500 people (Holland 16-17). This community of spectators was intimate but sizable and of varied composition. Pepys' diary and other early accounts prove that it was undoubtedly a mixed-gender venue, enjoyed and influenced by both male and female spectators. But some discrepancy exists about the social strata represented in the Restoration audience: some theater historians describe it as including Londoners from the widest range of social classes, while others describe theatergoers as primarily consisting of the elite upper classes. Based on evidence garnered from diaries, newspapers, and other historical documents, Van Lennep concludes that the Restoration audience appeared to have leaned toward the aristocratic, fashionable set, but also to have included citizens of London's middle class, as well as the lower classes who accompanied the aristocrats as servants or

were able to purchase discount tickets midway through a show (The London Stage; McAfee 278-285). Pepys' diary verifies that Charles II and other members of the court, including the Queen, the Duke of Monmouth, Lady Castlemaine, and the Duke of Buckingham, were active patrons and audience members in the 1660s (McAfee 277-278). Anecdotal evidence also shows that other "less wealthy people visited the theatre—civil servants, bureaucrats, and other professional men with their wives, as well as a selection from the poorer classes, servants, apprentices and journeymen" (Howe 6). Pepys records a conversation he had with theater owner Thomas Killigrew on February 1668 in which Killigrew states that the audience consists of "all civil people" (McAfee 279). Killigrew's comments indicate that the audience consisted of court members as well as regular citizens, a term suggestive of both upper and middle class urbanites. Demographically, then, the theater audience consisted of a cross section of society. Most theater historians today agree that in the 1660s and 1670s aristocratic patronage of the theater was stronger, just as new productions were more frequent, but that in the 1680s, during the reign of James II, aristocratic patronage fell off and theater activity began to decline until the end of the decade when, after the Glorious Revolution, theater production picked up again.

Ladies were a formidable contingency in the audience, as appeals for their approval in many prologues and epilogues show. But there were other recognizable groups as well. Montague Summers describes the composition of the audience across the different sections of the theater: the noisy, rowdy pit in front of the stage was where the critics, wits, and gallants stood; boxes on either side were reserved for aristocrats and

respectable persons of quality; the noisy middle gallery contained a mixture of people and was the most “popular part of the house;” and finally the upper gallery was the least fashionable and undesirable section where orange wenches and “ladies of easy virtue crowded the theatre” (67). As shown in several entries by Pepys, the orange girls mingled about the theater selling fruit and chatting with the spectators (McAfee 283-285).¹⁸ Ladies from court and orange girls were not the only women found in the theater. A range of upper and middle class women, as well as actresses on their nights off, were all among the audience. Pepys states that he and his wife sat next to two actresses, Nell Gwyn and Rebecca Marshall, at a performance at the King’s theater in May 1665 (McAfee 243-244) and that he again saw “the jade Nell” sitting in an upper box seat in January of 1669 where she “lay laughing there upon people...that come in to see the play” (McAfee 248). These descriptions show that the theater was a colorful and lively venue where the ladies of several social classes could be found.

Genteel ladies who attended theater had to guard their reputations. Cibber notes that, in the earlier decades of the Restoration, ladies who wanted to attend a new play, of which the levels of virtue vs. libertinism might not be known, would come in masks, which he states were “daily worn, and admitted, in the Pit, the Side-Boxes, and Gallery” (155). According to Rosenthal, “appearing at the theater in a mask became so widespread a custom that the device that covered the face and the identity became a

¹⁸ Pepys gives some humorous accounts of the orange girls; for example, he describes how at one performance Orange Moll, the head orange woman, “thrust her finger” down the throat of a gentleman who was choking on an orange and “brought him back to life again” (McAfee 284).

synecdoche for the whole person” (206). Thus, many prologues and epilogues use the term vizard mask to connote the female contingency in the audience. Although women wore masks to shield their virtuous identities, they apparently were not offended enough to stay away, and records show their continued attendance despite the raucous atmosphere of the playhouses.

Throughout the Restoration period, the enthusiastic theater audience was like an unruly club whose members were familiar with the generally accepted patterns of behavior. The audience actually interacted with the performers and performances. As Jean Marsden states,

...the world of the Restoration theater was not hermetically sealed, nor was it indifferent to the presence of the audience. ...[M]embers of the audience ... became part of the action and objects of the gaze... [N]ot only was the contrast between darkness and light [between the stage and audience] largely nonexistent...but the audience’s gaze could wander between several images on the stage and within the audience itself. In general, the intimate character of the Restoration and early-eighteenth-century playhouses made attendance a communal event (10).

The theater created a provocative cultural site in which audiences were involved and vocal. The atmosphere was nothing like the polite venue of the salon. Citing evidence from diaries, essays, prologues, and epilogues, Styan states that “Restoration playgoers were uncommonly ill-behaved” (8). But they were also loyal and highly experienced

spectators. As Howe states, Restoration theater had a following of regular attendees, many of whom patronized the theater at least once a week, knew each other and the members of both theater companies personally, and “were...extremely familiar with the various established modes of drama and with the types of role specialized in by different players” (7). Samuel Pepys, for example, saw *The Maiden Queen* performed five times between March and May of 1667 (McAfee 244-245). Audience participation was not only part of the ambience; it was the lifeblood of the theater. Howe goes so far to say that “[u]ltimately power in the theatre lay with the audience... All productions were subject to fierce critical examination by highly experienced spectators who damned and applauded with equal vigour” (7-8). The level of audience involvement in Restoration theater is one of its unique aspects in theater history. The audience even mingled backstage, and, Montague Summers suggests, some of the male fans partook of sexual encounters with actresses, but the custom of allowing audience members on stage was ceased temporarily from the time of Charles II’s reign until around 1690, some years after Charles’ death, when the stage began filling up again with spectators (54-60).

The town enjoyed the critique of its theatre as much as the theatre itself. The first round critiques occurred in the theatre from the audience, the second wave at coffee-houses and other gathering places, and yet further critique was preserved in private letters and diaries, as well as published magazines and newspapers. The wits in the audience sat in the noisy pit in front of the stage where the performance could be viewed in closest proximity. Montague Summers describes the pit as the “hub of all the turmoil and clamour” with “Fop Corner, a portion of the house nearest the stage, a hornet’s nest of

malice and scandal where the fair-pated beaux and snarling critics clustered and buzzed and stung” (77). The pit was generally a male-only area of the theater, crowded by the young wits. Any respectable woman would not have wanted to be there.

According to Summers, after a performance the wits would meet at Will’s Coffee House to critique the production (77). At the coffee houses, spectators became speakers, and sometimes speakers became spectators. Summers gives an example of Aphra Behn witnessing a wit and supposed friend of hers deriding a production of *The Lucky Chance* to the crowd at the coffee house when formerly this friend had praised it to her privately (77). Thus the coffee house provided another public, mixed-gender rhetorical venue, which shared some of the same topics as the venue of the theater, but where the form of rhetoric was conversation rather than dramatic performance.¹⁹

Performing the Restoration’s Rhetoric of Gender

Among theatre historians, Restoration drama is acknowledged as a drama of performance. As Styan notes, the excellence of Restoration drama lay not in the plays as stand-alone works of literature (as in Shakespeare) but in the constant interplay of the playwright, players, and audience in the theater (43). The Restoration theater was remembered (not always positively) as a striking performative venue well into the next century. Looking back from the late-eighteenth century, belletristic theorist Hugh Blair

¹⁹ An exploration of seventeenth and eighteenth century coffee houses as mixed-gender rhetorical venues is beyond the scope of this study, but such a study could provide more insights into the conversational rhetorics of the period.

states that, during the reign of Charles II, what was in vogue in the theatre was “an affected brilliancy of wit” (15). We can read both compliment and insult in Blair’s words. In a more laudatory tone, early twentieth-century critic Montague Summers notes that “When Hart and Mohun, Mrs. Marshall and Nell Gwyn, Betterton and Smith, Mrs. Barry and Mrs. Bracegirdle acted what Dryden, Wycherly, Otway, and Congreve wrote the Restoration theatre with all its drawbacks reached a zenith of brilliance which was certainly not sustained in the Hanoverian era” (289). As Summers points out, during the Restoration period, the most impressive, and arguably persuasive, element in the theater was the speaker as seen in the combination of talented playwrights and players. Yet the interactivity of speaker and audience also cannot be underestimated. These interdependencies are well illustrated by the words of Colley Cibber:

the best Tragick *Writer*, however numerous his separate *Admirers* may be, yet unite them into one general Act of Praise, to receive at once, those thundring Peals of Approbation, which a *crowded Theatre* throws out, he must still call in the Assistance of the skilful *Actor*, to raise and partake of them (53, italics added).

In Cibber’s description, we can see all the elements of the rhetorical situation working together: the speaker (in the combination of “best” writer and the “skilful” actor), the message (which is the performance being described), the audience (who are the “Admirers”), and the context of “crowded Theater.” Cibber’s words emphasize the importance of all the elements: playwrights, players, message, and audience.

Although we have no means to witness a theatrical performance from the late seventeenth century, contemporary accounts exist not only of the performances but also of the delivery skill required of actors and actresses. A rich source for learning about the rhetorical delivery skills of Restoration actors is late seventeenth-century miscellaneous writer Charles Gildon who, although considered by some of his contemporaries to be a hack writer, nevertheless captures the unique style of Restoration acting in his writing. Gildon's *The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton* is an extensive work that compares acting to oratory and describes how both players and orators require training and skill in gesture, expression, and speech to deliver persuasive performances. As Gildon states, "the Mastery of these two parts [action and speech] is what compleats an Actor" (33). (Because of his many examples of Restoration actresses, we can surmise that Gildon uses the term actor in the generic sense to describe both male and female performers.) Gildon calls the stage as "the Seat of Passion" and describes the various movements, expressions, and gestures that a player would use in performing serious dramas or tragedies (40-48). He stresses that, for an actor to have the desired impact on the audience, movement and gesture appropriate to the passion conveyed must be visible to the spectators, and it must appear natural (51-53). The virtues of effective speech, whether for the stage, bar, or pulpit, Gildon describes as Purity, Perspicuity, Ornament, and Hability (or Aptitude) (93). Gildon also underlines the importance of visual rhetoric to performance, in his assertion that, to be convincing, an actor "must vary with his Argument, that is, carry the Person in all his Manners and Qualities... in every Action and Passion... that his Eyes, his Looks or Countenance, Motions of the Body, Hands and

Feet, be all of a Piece” (34). Gildon does permit that exaggerated action and gesture can be effective to convey ridiculous affects, such as might be needed for comic characters, but that “even that very Affectation must be unaffected” (53). From her reading of Gildon, Howe conjectures that a naturalistic style of acting was valued in comedy, but that naturalness itself was not without guidelines. Rather it was based on ingrained habitudes that we might surmise from “a vast array of seventeenth-century books describing correct social behavior” (Howe 13). In all cases, Gildon’s criteria for convincing performance include the actor or actress’ understanding and communication of the passions through both speech and gesture.

Restoration playwrights, as authors of the message, were some of the first to consider how new productions for the Restoration theater would employ the skills of the actresses. Playwrights such as John Dryden, George Etherege, William Wycherly, Thomas Durfey, Aphra Behn, and Thomas Shadwell were able to create roles with the new female actresses in mind. Of course, any reading of feminist rhetoric in Restoration drama would not be complete without at least a brief discussion Behn whom many have called the first professional woman writer in England—or, as Hughes has more precisely put it, the first “full-time woman dramatist” (6).²⁰ From 1670 to 1689, Behn authored over a dozen plays, many of which were extremely popular with Restoration audiences

²⁰ As both Hughes and Todd note, Katherine Philips had translated Corneille’s *La Mort de Pompee*, which had been performed in Dublin and possibly in London in 1663, and that several female-authored plays, Frances Boothbay’s *Marcellia* and Elizabeth Powhele’s *The Faithful Virgins* and *The Frolicks*, were performed around 1667-1668 (Hughes 5-6; Todd *Oroonoko, The Rover, and Other Works* 9). But Behn was the first prominent woman dramatist who made a living by her pen. During the first decade of the Restoration, many plays were still being written by amateurs; Hughes calls Behn “only the third professional dramatist of either sex to emerge since 1660” after Dryden and Shadwell (6).

and were performed for several decades after her death. Behn is interesting from a rhetorical perspective in a couple of the ways: first, in the way she used the stage and associated dramatic genres to dialog with the public, often directly addressing the ladies and men in the audience, and secondly in her use of feminist symbolism and themes in her plays to indirectly communicate the injustices of patriarchy. Behn was certainly not alone in her critique of patriarchy. Nearly all of the playwrights of the period did so in one way or another. This shows that problems with patriarchy, including forced marriage, the rule of primogeniture, and the lack of provisions for younger brothers and unmarried women, were problems of interest to the audience.

Ultimately, the common purpose of speakers in the rhetorical venue of the Restoration theater was to succeed in pleasing the audience and critics enough to warrant a repeat performance for as many nights as possible; the third night's earnings were a benefit for the playwright. Prior to opening night, usually a month's worth of rehearsal went into the preparation for each performance. Thus, the theater as a rhetorical venue extended beyond the temporal boundaries of a single performance. As Howe notes, playwrights wrote plays with the preconceptions of the audience, as well as the specialties of particular actors and actresses, in mind (11). With both the audiences' tastes and players' abilities to consider, Restoration playwrights strove for novelty and created new genres, many of which were highly focused on questions of gender relationships. The primary mode of comedy became the Comedy of Manners, but more so than the French flavor of this genre (as in the broadly-themed satires of Moliere), the Restoration comedy of manners was primarily focused on satirizing romantic couples, courtship, and

marriage. Restoration comedies typically end in marriage, upholding the social order instilled by customs of primogeniture. John Harrington Smith notes that while both male and female characters in Restoration drama resist marriage, audiences of the period knew this eventuality was the “destiny” of the “Restoration gallant...no less than the Restoration lady” (77). Tragedy was also feminized by the playwrights and actresses of the Restoration and Post-restoration periods, with the plays of the 1680s, 1690s, and early eighteenth century increasingly focused on the tragic heroine, as I shall show in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. During this period, the female-focus in theater dominated all genres of drama and caused playwrights to create specialized character types, such as the gay couple, the rake hero or libertine, the female libertine, and the tragic heroine to further explore male-female interaction on the stage.

In the first decade of the Restoration, the major innovation in genre was a new form of comedy that was directly influenced by the debut of actresses and a new pair of dominant character types: the witty lovers. In the mid-twentieth century John Harrington Smith dubbed this pair from the Restoration “the gay couple” and described them as “two young people who express the mood of their time” (47). The play that propelled the gay couple into the spotlight was John Dryden’s *Secret Love or The Maiden-Queen* (1667), which paired actress Nell Gwyn with actor Charles Hart (Howe 70-71; Holland 81-86; Loftis 332). The chemistry between Gwyn and Hart was integral to the success and popularity of the gay couple on stage. In the early years of the Restoration, the gay couple is invariably presented as a pair of equals sparring in contests of witty repartee. Smith states that in the first decade following the Restoration, they were almost always

portrayed as “two well-matched players—neither under a handi-cap, neither given a special advantage” (41), but underlying the seeming equality of the gay couple was a double-standard for sexual virtue, which was not required of the hero but was always required of the heroine (77). The gay couple as a dramatic form gave women a public voice, allowing them, if only on the stage, to become more than a silent partner.

But the perceived equality of the gay couple was debatable or at least only temporary. The common critical viewpoint today concerning the plays of the mid 1670s is that female characters suffered a loss of equality brought about by increasingly libertine story lines that depict the mistreatment of women. By 1675-76, Smith notes that in most comedies the woman’s advantages are “lost and the gallant takes the lead,” a trend that begins with the brilliantly witty but misogynist rake character Dorimant in Etheridge’s *The Man of Mode* (84). On the other hand, Derek Hughes argues strongly that *The Man of Mode* is not representative of the typical sex comedies of the 1670s and that in the drama of the period “male dominance is far from the rule” (2). Whichever point of view one accepts, the rake-hero, or libertine, is the most well known comic character type that emerged in Restoration comedy. Harold Weber states “the repentant rake is the accepted convention in Restoration comedy” and is appealing because it “allows the audience to enjoy... exhilarating freedom vicariously while assuring them that freedom will be sacrificed in the end to the demands of society” (68). The rake-hero, as a male type, is significant to feminist study in that it clearly shows Restoration anxieties about customs of patriarchy. The custom of marriage is a big problem for the rake character because, as Weber points out, from the rake’s point of view limiting

oneself to a single sexual partner results in “inevitable sexual boredom” (83). The libertine rake tests the moral strength of the female and the social fabric of patriarchy. Male libertine characters are always duplicitous and charismatic, but female characters are not defenseless against them. As Weber notes, the possession of financial fortune is one way that playwrights gave women characters power over the rakes (145-146). Another defense is a woman’s virtue, and another is wit, especially as seen in female characters that are also rakish.

The female rake or libertine, a twist on the male rake-hero, is significant, within the context of theater as rhetorical situation, as the speakers attempt to create a female trope of equality to neutralize the activities of the libertine. Probably first seen in the character of Hellena in Aphra Behn’s *The Rover*, the female libertine shares many of the characteristics of the male libertine. But, as Weber notes, she is even more “difficult to domesticate...[because] her sexual vitality and defiance of male authority create fears that remain unresolved” (Weber 153). The female libertine, even as a dramatic argument on the Restoration stage, is ultimately an impossibility. Her role, even more so than the male libertine, is at odds with patriarchal ideology. Nevertheless, the libertine and the female libertine remained popular character types throughout the Restoration period. From a rhetorical perspective, their popularity stands as a response to exigency of patriarchal inequities, a sign of the desire to break the chains of tradition but also of the fear of doing so. Libertine rhetoric gradually declines in by the end of the seventeenth century for reasons that shall be seen in chapter 3.

Another female version of an originally male type in these early witty comedies is the female fop, a type similar to the male fop made famous in the title character of Sir Foppling Flutter in Etheridge's *Man of Mode*. As Styan describes her, the female fop is a silly woman, often portrayed as a "*precieuse ridicule* and a would-be gentlewoman" (127). The female fop is excessive in her affectations, grooming, and gestures. Styan gives Melantha, a silly young coquette obsessed by all things French in Dryden's *Marriage a la Mode* (1672), as an example of the female fop. Witty comic heroines and female fops abound in Restoration comedy and continue to appear in comedy of the Revolutionary period, but their popularity gradually declines in favor of more pathetic and sentimental females.

Whether the roles were comic or tragic, patriarchal or subversive, the dialog of most characters revolved around courtship, sex, marriage, fidelity, and other gender issues. Some of the most common linguistic rhetorical devices relating to the female are metaphors of the female body as a commodity to be bought, sold, and gambled or as a household object to be used. Another common comparison is that of monogamy and marriage to slavery. Metaphors that commodify the female as goods bartered in marriage or prostitution appear consistently from the Restoration all the way to the 1720s, from the early libertine comedies, such as Behn's *The Rover*, to tragedies such as Otway's *Venice Preserved* and Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage*, to the comedy of manners such as Congreve's *Way of the World*, and even in the later Whiggish comedies and tragedies, such as Centlivre's *Bold Stroke for a Wife* and Rowe's *The Tragedy of Lady Jane Gray*. Rhetorical devices and strategies revolving around gender in the comedy of this period

also include witty repartee, raillery, double entendre, innuendo, euphemism and puns in dialog between the characters, as well as asides from the characters to the audience. In *Way of the World*, for example, the heroine Millamant's identity as a female coquette is defined by the coy language of indirection. As Pat Gill notes, Millamant's comic mode lies in her "elegant and delightful wordplay...[H]er language has very little to do with straightforward discourse. She makes her way through the minefield of salacious double entendre, attempting to maintain the tenuous balance between an acceptable wit and a too sophisticated understanding" (166). In her rhetorical skill, Millamant as a character is typical of other Restoration heroines who must balance just the right amount of innocence and worldliness.

Devices of visual rhetoric in dramatic performance were also heavily influenced by the presence of females on stage, with the most striking visual element being the costume and appearance of the actresses themselves. Since the Elizabethan times, clothing had been a very important sign of English culture. During the Restoration, theatrical costume was brightly colored and excessively fancy. As noted by Styan, it "was the vogue to dazzle the eye with a rainbow of reds, yellows, blues, and greens" in lace, brocade, and satin and for women to envelope their torsos in tight corsets and stays to make a straight upper silhouette, which exposed shoulders and bosom on top and billowed out into a full, flowing skirt on the bottom (96-100). Summers states that costumes were not exact in every detail or always historically accurate, but they form "a kind of symbolism" which was striking to the audience (254). Lowenthal discusses the relationship of clothing and make-up to individual self-fashioning and what she and

others have identified as the Restoration theater's society of spectacle (21-23). This self-fashioning is important to women's image on stage where clothing and personal appearance enact a visual argument about female social status. But, public perception of women in costume still was influenced by taboos inherited from the Renaissance era. As King and Rabil note, "Related to the problem of [female] speech was that of costume—another, if silent, form of self-expression. ...The appropriate function of costume and adornment was to announce the status of a woman's husband or father. Any further indulgence in adornment was akin to unchastity" (xxviii). Of course, playwrights recognized the taboos associated with female costume and makeup and could use these associations to create visual spectacles and metaphors on stage. Lowenthal calls clothing an "abiding trope for deceitfulness of the material world," and she cites Terry Castle's theories on the metaphoric relationship between clothing and female deception (24).

The wearing of pants by women was visual taboo broken so often on stage that it became a stock device. The breeches role, as it was known, a comic form originally used in medieval romance plays of France and Italy, was imported and became popular in Elizabethan English theater (Weber 164). But when actresses took the stage, the breeches role enabled the actual display of real female legs on stage. Breeches roles were not only risqué but very popular: from 1660 to 1700, eighty-nine plays—one quarter—of the 375 plays shown on the London stage contained a breeches part (Styan 134; Howe 57). Breeches roles are found in plays from the 1660s, such as Nell Gwyn as Florimel in Dryden's *Secret Love*, through the early eighteenth century, such as Anne Oldfield in Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*. A female actress dressed in breeches, playing a man,

and exposing her legs was highly erotic to Restoration audiences, and it allowed for the development of many comic events.

The makeup of the actress was another opportunity for visual rhetoric and symbolism. Her makeup consisted of a white face decorated with, usually two or three, black silk patches. As Styan notes, these decorations were often symbolic:

Sometimes a patch conveyed a secret message of intent: one at the corner of the eye suggested a passionate nature, one in the centre of the cheek the lady's gaiety, one on the nose her pertness. There was room for invention, but if all were applied together the opposite sex might have found the message confusing (106).

Styan's insights on the face painting and patches take on new significance when interpreted through the canons of classical rhetoric. The application of makeup is invention, with the face as the text, the actress the mode of delivery, and the audience as supplying the memory of cultural signs. But, as Styan notes above, too many signals would reduce the persuasive affect of the character.

The visual rhetoric of female performance also included was the use of props, such as the fan, the mask, and the letter. The fan was an exclusively female prop, useful to lady characters for flirting, delivering asides, and hiding from other characters and the audience. During the Restoration, a lady on stage or off was considered in a state of undress without her fan (Styan 107). Another standard accessory that came into fashion during the Restoration was the vizard mask. The mask, which may have originated as a device to protect a lady's make-up in bad weather, first became an accessory for

prostitutes but then also became popular with fine ladies as “a toy with which to play adult games” (Styan 113-114). Female theater patrons of all social classes took up the practice of wearing masks to performances, and the masking of female characters was written into many plots. Letters were also common props on the stage and often involved a correspondence of courtship or intrigue between two characters of the opposite sex. How the female characters handled the letters was often meant to titillate the audience. Styan writes “the Restoration stage invented the device that might be called ‘the bosom as letterbox’,” as is enacted in Margery Pinchwife’s concealing of a letter from her husband in *The Country Wife*...or even the outing of such a practice as in *The Rover* when the courtesans “pin inviting messages” on their breasts (92). Behn takes the bosom-as-letter-box motif to the extreme in *The Rover* when the comic character Blunt maliciously announces that he plans to rape and torture the romantic heroine Florinda; he states:

Cruel? Yes, I will kiss and beat thee all over...; thou shalt lie with me too, not that I care for the enjoyment, but to let thee see I have ta’en deliberated malice to thee...I will smile and deceive thee, ... fawn on thee and strip thee stark naked; then *hang thee out my window by the heels, with a paper of scurvy verses fastened to thy breast*, in praise of damnable women. (632 italics added)

This sadistic image of raping, torturing, labeling, and displaying a naked woman with dirty poems attached to her breast, while presented in a comic scene, is nonetheless a radical feminist protest statement by Behn. In this scene, Behn satirically outs both the

covert practice of concealing letters as well as women's vulnerable position in the patriarchal system. The scurvy notes are imagined signs playing on accepted theatrical motifs to deliver a stark and shocking visual image to the audience. Arlen Feldweg goes so far to say that Behn "viewed the design of her comedies as overtly polemical" (224). She was not only entertaining her audiences, but deliberately and aggressively confronting them with the injustices of the patriarchal system.²¹

Rape or attempted rape is another female-focused visual motif employed in many Restoration and Post-Restoration plays, most often tragedies but also some comedies such as *The Rover*. In "Rape, Voyeurism, and the Restoration Stage," Jean Marsden reviews the visual spectacle or evidence of rape in plays, especially tragedies of the 1680s and 90s, as a misogynist display of male power in Restoration culture, a display that feeds a voyeuristic need in the spectators as it prescribes female powerlessness and objectivity. Marsden describes the semiotics of Restoration stage rapes, citing quite a few examples, including a play by Nicholas Brady that was actually titled *The Rape; or, The Innocent Imposters* (1692), which starred the chaste and desirable Anne Bracegirdle as the victimized heroine Eurione (191). But not all theatre historians view rape scenes as entirely misogynist and voyeuristic. Derek Hughes and Susan Staves have argued that depictions of rape, especially in the hands of female playwrights such as the confrontational Aphra Behn and leading actresses such as the chaste Bracegirdle or the

²¹ It is generally acknowledged that Behn's depiction of male violence and female vulnerability stand as a metaphor for her own position as a professional woman working in a time when public employment was not a respectable female role (Todd, Hughes).

emotionally riveting Elizabeth Barry, also served a feminist purpose of revealing problems and female suffering caused by patriarchy. Just as these dramatic images of violence on stage impacted spectators, so the real image of actresses excited their curiosity and their criticism.

Re-visioning Restoration Actresses

Life as a Restoration actress offered women a rare professional opportunity, a measure of social prominence, and a community of peers, but it was not a respectable or an easy life. Although actresses were immensely popular with the theater-going public, they usually had fewer roles available to them than actors who outnumbered them in most seasons; and, except for the most successful actresses, they were paid significantly less than the actors (Howe 27-28). Actors and actresses were not compensated equally, but it seems they worked equally hard. Howe states that each theater would produce from forty to sixty different plays a season and that leading actors and actresses might play up to 30 different parts (9). The job of actress not only required a retinue of performative skills but also a cultivated demeanor. Finding new actresses was difficult because “no woman with serious pretensions to respectability would countenance a stage career, and yet the profession demanded more than women of the brothel class”; it required an individual who could speak and move well, sing, dance, and portray genteel and refined characters (Howe 8). Good candidates for actresses included girls of impoverished aristocratic families, bastard daughters of the gentry, and daughters of tradesmen. Despite the

workload, inequities, and stigmas of acting, the financial benefits and the allure of fame and celebrity provided some attraction. And there was the opportunity to perform.

To perform successfully, any actress (or actor) on any stage in any period, must be believable in his or her role, inspire empathy, and exude an intrinsic credibility in their own persona. In these rhetorical traits, the actress is similar to the orator. Unlike orators, however, many of the Restoration actresses were popular, in part, for their openly wanton public personas. Nell Gwyn, Elizabeth Barry, Rebecca Marshall, Elizabeth Boutell, and Charlotte Butler were all promoted on their apparently accurate reputations of promiscuity. Many of these women were also considered to be talented actresses, but their personal reputations often overshadowed their acting. On the other hand, a few actresses, such as Mary Saunderson Betterton and Anne Bracegirdle, were known for their high morals and chastity. The female stereotypes that actresses fell into were, of course, reductive. In reality, each actress was a unique individual, and collectively they formed a group of professional craftswomen who worked together, rehearsing and performing in the mixed-gender business of the theater company. Working with their fellow actors and playwrights, the actresses taught each other and developed new methods for acting and performing. The following subsections detail the unique contributions of several Restoration actresses to theater and the craft of acting, focusing especially on how their work belongs to the female rhetorical tradition.

Nell Gwyn

Perhaps, better than any other individual female, the infamous Nell Gwyn embodies the male fantasy of a Restoration actress—a beautiful, sexually available, witty, happy-go-lucky whore. Certainly, this image was distasteful to many women (and men) of her time, as it might well be to many people today. But a public image is not the same thing as the real person. Looking at the reportedly real actions of Nell Gwyn in the context of Restoration London, we might re-vision Mrs. Gwyn as a flamboyant actress and mistress to the king who was also an influential practitioner of social rhetoric with a leaning toward moderate social activism. This rhetorical reading of Gwyn is entirely conceivable through what is known of her life.

Nell Gwyn rose from the hard life of a working girl of the street to become one of the most talented and popular comediennes of Restoration theater. According to Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans, Gwyn began working in the theater as an “orange girl” in 1663 sometime in her teens or very early twenties but within a year and a half turned from vending to acting in minor roles (6: 458). Her acting career was interrupted when the theater was closed from during the 1665 -1666 season on account of the plague and the great fire of London. When the theater reopened in 1666, Gwyn was promoted to major roles and quickly rose to popularity. Through a combined accounting of the histories provided in *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses...* and Howe’s *The First English Actresses*, it appears that Gwyn acted a dozen or so roles from 1665 and 1670 (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 6:457-459; Howe 184). Loftis states that “Dryden and his fellow dramatists, searching for a new style in comedy in that first decade of the

professional actress, found in Nell a living model for their quick-witted and saucy heroines, those anti-Platonic coquettes who influence if they do not establish the tone of the plays” (332). With her sauciness, Gwyn was also quite popular as a deliverer of prologues and epilogues. One curious aspect of Gwyn as an actress and speech maker was that she was nearly illiterate; historians conjecture that she must have had the assistance of a reader to help her learn her lines and that “she must have had a remarkable ear and memory” (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 6:460). Despite her talent and popularity, Gwyn’s stage career lasted less than a decade: she retired early in the 1670s while she was still in her prime. As theater historian W.J. Macqueen Pope put it, Gwyn left the stage to become the favorite mistress of the “merry monarch” himself and no longer needed to work (44-47). One might also speculate that her status as both courtesan to the king and commoner was an argument against the elite status and infallible morality demanded by an absolute monarchy as well as an argument of opportunity for common people.

During her relatively short stage career, Gwyn was a favorite of audiences and boon for playwrights. So great was Gwyn’s comedic ethos that Holland states that, in her pairing with Charles Hart, she was the first actress to publicly perform the role of “a woman who could credibly rival male wit” (86). As mentioned earlier, the Gwyn and Hart pairing was the driving force behind the emergence of the gay couple in Restoration comedy, a genre epitomized by Dryden’s *Secret Love*. In the editorial notes to the play, Loftis emphasizes how much of an impact Gwyn had on Dryden’s conception of Florimel, the play’s heroine, and how well her performance delivered on Dryden’s

inspiration (Loftis 331-332). As evidence of Gwyn's success, Pepys' diary praises her unsurpassed comic skill as Florimel. After seeing *Secret Love* on March 2, 1667, Pepys wrote

so great a performance of a comical part was never, I believe in the world before as Nell do this, both as a mad girle, then most and best of all when she comes in like a young gallant; and hath the motions and carriage of a spark the most that ever I saw any man have. It makes me, I confess, admire her (McAfee 244).

Gwyn's performance inspired Pepys' admiration not just because of her beauty but because of her skilled and energetic delivery. Pepys confessed his admiration despite the inappropriateness of a feisty female performing as a "mad girle" and, even worse, cross-dressing as a "young gallant." Pepys explains how Gwyn captivated the public eye—a rhetorical feat that transcended not only her origins of common street girl but the female's role of private individual.

Given the circumscribed role of women in the late 1660s, Gwyn's public individuality also produced public anxiety. Her success was groundbreaking in giving women public personality and voice, but her lifestyle and persona were in direct conflict with perceived patriarchal norms. In the 1670s, just as Gwyn's stage career was winding down, Aphra Behn was experiencing a similar kind of notorious recognition in her success as a female playwright. Behn clearly recognized her parity with Gwyn. Capitalizing on this parallel, Behn dedicated *The Feign'd Curtizans*—the first play that

she ever dedicated—to Nell Gwyn. Behn’s dedication includes the following words of praise about the actress:

Insomuch that succeeding ages who shall with joy survey your History shall Envy us...; they can only guess She was infinitely fair, witty, and deserving, but to what Vast degrees in all, they can only Judge who liv’d to Gaze and Listen; so Natural and so fitted are all your Charms and Excellencies..., you never appear but you glad the hearts of all that have the happy fortune to see you, as if you were made on purpose to put the whole world into good Humour,...when you speak, men crowd to listen... and bear away the precious words to home to all the attentive family...*but oh she spoke with such an Ayr, so gay, that half the beauty’s lost in the repetition.* ‘Tis this that ought to make your Sex... despise the malicious world that will allow a woman no wit, and bless our selves for living in an Age that can produce so wondrous an argument as your undeniable self
(Todd, *The Works of Aphra Behn* 6:86)

Behn’s clever wording offers Gwyn as an “argument” for female public performance. Her argument is so laudatory in its tone that Samuel Johnson, in his biography of Dryden, remarked that it even exceeded the “servility of hyperbolic adulation” displayed in Dryden’s excessively styled dedications (Todd 85). The hyperbole is twofold: Behn offers both Gwyn’s sex appeal and her talent as an actress together as an argument for public female performance. Lowenthal states that this “double bind of female identity ...exceeds the theatrical space, for women’s sexuality was never authorized to be a public

spectacle, even though both Gwyn and Behn self-consciously exploited that prohibition” (2). Lowenthal’s observation of doubleness is true enough, but she is mistaken on one point: Charles’ 1662 decree calling for actresses in female roles did, in effect, authorize women’s sexuality as public spectacle. Sexually-focused female performances, such as Gwyn’s acting and Behn’s playwriting, were the result of Charles’ authorization. The cultural and political conditions during the Restoration allow Behn’s dedication to position a “notorious mistress as a goddess” in an ironic panegyric that “both mocks and enacts the opportunity for the feigning of identity” (Lowenthal 3). The rhetorical purpose of Behn’s dedication is to call attention to the parallel between herself and Nell Gwyn, another successful female of the theater. But Behn would not have published this dedication if its argument did not have some level of credibility. Nell Gwyn must have had powerful stage presence to warrant such public praise, not only of her beauty but of her voice and delivery. Through surviving accounts from Behn, Pepys, and others, we can assume that the praise is deserved.

Gwyn’s beauty, spark, and gift for comedy made her an influential figure on the stage. She was an extremely charismatic performer who captured and captivated the attention of all: audiences, playwrights, males and females, and even the King himself. Offstage her persona was derided in numerous articles, pamphlets and bawdy works of verse and lyric, yet letters of correspondence and legal documents of the period show her to be well-liked (if somewhat wild), politically neutral, generous and charitable to the common people (Highfill 6:463-469). Over the centuries, Gwyn has been remembered in over a half dozen biographies, although the facts of her life are often mixed with legend.

Amongst theater historians, she is a memorable figure, and as Highfill notes “It surely would have pleased Nell, who came from common stock, to know that common folk today whom might look blank at the names of Burbage, Betterton, Garrick, Kemble, or Siddons might well recognize the name of Nell Gwyn—and recognize her not just as a famous whore, but a famous actress” (Highfill 6:470). Gwyn’s success as a public performer was quite an astounding professional achievement for a common woman of her time and paved the way for future actresses.

Mary Saunderson Betterton

One of the earliest English actresses, Mary Saunderson, embodies another argument altogether than that of Nell Gwyn’s. Known for her wide repertoire of roles, portraying both virtuous girls and villainesses, and for marrying the great Restoration actor, Thomas Betterton with whom she lived faithfully until his death. Over an acting career that spanned from the 1660s to the early 1690s and as a behind-the-scenes presence in the theater until her death in 1710, Mrs. Betterton worked steadily at her craft. (I add the “Mrs.” to her name to distinguish her from her famous husband). While other actresses were arousing public curiosity with their provocative personas and public private lives, Mrs. Betterton was one of the very few actresses to be noted for her impeccable moral character. Clearly, in a time when most actresses and actors were derided by critics and moralists, Mrs. Betterton consistently received critical praise for her acting and remained respected and personally “unscathed” (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:99). Although Mary Saunderson Betterton’s offstage life was not

flamboyant. From the few existing accounts, she appeared to be a quiet woman, but she was a busy actress.

From 1661 to 1694, Mrs. Betterton appeared in at least 57 roles (Howe 180-181). Her first performance on record is as Ianthe in Davenant's *The Siege of Rhodes*, for which she received high praise by many, including Pepys who in his diary called her "my little Ianthe" thereafter (Highfill 2:96). Cibber also notes that Mrs. Betterton "chiefly excelled... without Rival" in her portrayal of Shakespearean female roles, including Ophelia, Lady Macbeth, and Juliet, (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:98). In 1690, after seeing Mrs. Betterton perform Lady Macbeth when she was fifty-three, Cibber commented that she "was so great a Mistress of Nature that even Mrs. Barry, who acted the Lady Macbeth after her, could not in that Part, with all her superior Strength and melody of Voice, throw out those quick and careless strokes of Terror from the Disorder of a guilty Mind" (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:98). Mrs. Betterton also created a number of important new roles, such as savvy young Belinda in *The Man of Mode* (1676) and possibly the coquette Elvira in Dryden's *The Spanish Fryer* (1680) (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:97-98). For over thirty years, Mrs. Betterton graced the stage with consistently fine performances. In addition to her own performances, she was responsible for giving women a rhetorical voice as an acting mentor and as a teacher of elocution.

Throughout her career, Mrs. Betterton was known for the support and training she provided to younger actresses. She and her husband served as foster parents to fledgling actresses, including Ann Bracegirdle, who became one of the top actresses of the early

eighteenth century, and Elizabeth Watson, who married actor John Boman (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:97). Mrs. Betterton also trained Princess Anne in elocution; this “kindness” was remembered by the future queen who rewarded Mrs. Betterton a royal stipend in her old age (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:97). After 1700, Mrs. Betterton’s primary responsibility in the theater was in training young players. Further work into the archives and correspondence of Restoration theater patrons and personalities could potentially reveal more about Mrs. Betterton’s contributions as a teacher of elocution and a role model for younger female players. She obviously had a positive effect on her ward, Ann Bracegirdle who, like Mrs. Betterton, was one of the very few actresses to be noted for her impeccable moral character. Upon her death, Mrs. Betterton left mourning rings for Mrs. Bracegirdle and Mrs. Barry among several other of her close friends (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:99). Thus, although she was not as famous as Gwyn, Barry, or Bracegirdle, Mary Saunderson Betterton is clearly an example of a talented and successful Restoration actress who contributed memorable performances, helped other women excel in their own acting, and broke the actress-as-whore stereotype.

Elizabeth Barry: Her Early Career

The Restoration actress who unquestionably received the highest critical acclaim and the greatest financial success was Elizabeth Barry. She was a supreme tragedienne, a deft comedienne, a skilled business woman, and a tremendous worker. A detailed reading of Barry’s interactions with playwrights, players, and genres and her overall

development as an actress is offered by Elizabeth Howe in *The First English Actresses*, which over the course of several chapters devotes detailed attention to Barry's contributions to the stage, including the comedy of the 1670s, the tragedy of the 1680 and 90s, and Barry's later comic and tragic work in the early eighteenth century, particularly in her pairing with Ann Bracegirdle. As Howe notes, during Barry's thirty-six year career as an actress, "from 1673 to 1709 the brilliant Elizabeth Barry is known to have played 142 named parts" (9). From the start of her career, Elizabeth Barry was extremely dedicated, appealing to audiences, and respected by her peers (if not by the general public). Above all, Elizabeth Barry appears to have been shrewd. Even though actresses were paid less than actors of similar ability and seniority in the theater companies, Barry overcame the financial inequities. Not only did her salary increase with her popularity over the course of her career, but she also earned special financial awards and increased her income through active participation in the theater business management and ownership. Like many actresses, however, Barry's personal reputation was one of sexual promiscuity, and critics and satirists often disparaged her financial success as an indication of ruthlessness and insatiable greed. But, in posterity, praise of her talent supersedes critiques of her personal life. Thus, while her many famed sexual liaisons qualified her for the label of loose woman, her many professional accomplishments make it difficult to reduce her to the stereotype of a sexual commodity. This section covers Barry's early career, prior to 1680; a description of Barry at the height of her fame, from the 1680s to the early eighteenth century, is found in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Barry's contribution to female rhetoric centers on her unique and innovative techniques of delivery, which can be traced from her early training to her rise to stardom. She brought a new style of performance to the stage, a style that was based on naturalistic emotional expression and pathetic appeal to the audience.²² But Barry's acting was apparently not untaught genius but rather a skill that she cultivated through training. Very early in her career, when Barry was an unsuccessful actress, it is rumored that John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, saw her perform, pronounced that she had no ear for line-reading, and made a bet that he could transform her into a successful actress. Although the circumstances of how and why Rochester decided to train Barry are speculation, sometime during 1675 and 1676 he did train her in acting, and she became his mistress and protégé. As eighteenth-century writer Edmund Curll tells it, Rochester taught Barry to "enter into the Nature of each Sentiment; perfectly changing herself...into the Person, not merely by the proper Stress or Sounding of the Voice, but feeling really, and being in the Humour, the Person she represented, was supposed to be in" (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2: 314; Howe 114). The training was successful as evidenced by Barry's quickly becoming renowned for her emotionally powerful acting style.

Alas, we have no recordings of Barry's performances, but theater historians have preserved and passed-down many first-hand accounts and stellar reviews of Barry's

²² Interestingly, as noted by Paul Goring, mid-eighteenth-century critics and theater historians claim the "naturalized" style of acting was introduced to English theater by actor David Garrick in the 1740s and that it was a welcome relief from the overly mannered and posed Restoration style of acting. This contradiction may be due to the fact that, over the course of a half-century, what seemed natural had changed, or it may be due, as Goring suggests, to the influence of Charles Gildon's works on elocution and oratory in the early eighteenth century, which might have exaggerated the similarities of style between Restoration stage elocution and classical oratory and declamation (121-125).

delivery given by her contemporaries. Gildon praises the naturalness of Barry's acting as both outstanding among her peers (both male and female) and as following the great poetic traditions of the ancients:

Among those Players, who seem always to be in earnest, I must not omit the Principal, the incomparable Mrs. Barry; her Action is always just, and produc'd naturally by the Sentiments of the part, which she acts, and she every where observes those Rules prescrib'd to the Poets by Horace, and which equally reach the actors:

We weep and laugh as we see others do,
 He only makes me sad, who shews the way,
 And first is sad himself ...
 I feel the Weight of your Calamities,
 And fancy all your Miseries my own...

Lord Roscommon's Translation (Gildon 39)

Gildon's words help us understand Mrs. Barry's power on the stage: she was a conduit of emotion: she could feel as her character would and make the audience feel that way too. This ability to affect the audience through powerful delivery is a skill common to both acting and oratory, a point that has been noted not only by Gildon, but by Cicero and Quintilian in their major works on oratory. One wonders, then, with her considerable public speaking and business skills, and her panache, what Elizabeth Barry might have done if the venues of podium or pulpit had been available to her.

A somewhat easier, although still speculative, question to consider about Barry is: what was it that made her acting so powerful? The evidence points to her style or elocution. Through expression, carriage, gestures, and voice, Barry became the mistress of emotion. Cibber describes how Barry used her body and voice to convey pathos:

A Presence of elevated Dignity, her Mein and Motion superb and gracefully majestick; her Voice full, clear, and strong, so that no Violence of Passion could be too much for her; And when Distress or Tenderness possess'd her, she subsided into the most affecting Melody and Softness.

In the Art of exciting Pity she had a Power beyond all the Actresses I have yet seen (95)

Barry's facial expression spoke first, before gestures and words. Comedian Anthony Aston said that Barry's face "somewhat preceded her Action, as the latter did her Words, her Face ever expressing the Passions" (Highfill, Burnim, and Langan 2:324). These descriptions of Barry's acting suggest that her delivery style was, by today's standards, extremely melodramatic, calling to mind the great actress of early cinema, Greta Garbo, master of expression and gesture in silent film, who successfully broke into "talkies."

On a technical level, Barry's acting style served as a textbook case of elocutionary standards for movement, gesture, and speech. Yet, her acting was also frequently described as "just or judicious," which suggested that she maintained "a high degree of control" and a believability despite the emotionalism she emitted (Highfill, Burnim, and Langan 2:324). These descriptions of Barry indicate her extreme focus and dedication

to detail. For example, Langbaine comments in reference to Barry's acting in Thomas Southerne's *The Innocent Adultery* that she "did the poet all the *Justice* so admirable an actress, when she most exerts herself, could do" (136, italics added). Further details of Barry's delivery methods can be observed in descriptions of her rehearsing with other actors. Thomas Betterton, Barry's frequent co-star and the greatest male actor of the Restoration, stated that he and Mrs. Barry always made it a "practice to consult even the most indifferent Poet in any Part we have thought fit to accept" and that Barry "often exerted her self in an indifferent Part, that her Acting has given Success to such Plays, as to read would turn a Man's Stomach" (Gildon 16). In other words, Barry collaborating with the playwright could turn a mediocre script into an outstanding performance.

Another fellow actress, Mrs. Bradshaw, states that Mrs. Barry taught her to "make herself Mistress of her Part, and leave the Figure and Action to Nature" (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:324). When it came to imparting pathos, even the great Betterton might well have learned his delivery techniques from Barry. As Jocelyn Powell has stated, Barry was the creator of "a new acting style designed to 'stir rather than penetrate human nature' and...tragic actors like Betterton then followed her lead" (Howe 108). Barry's innovations in delivery techniques are one of several ways that she contributed to the history of female rhetoric. Her later career, described in chapter 3 of this dissertation, shows, perhaps more importantly, that Barry's performances brought attention to the difficult circumstances and inequities of being female in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century society.

During the first decade of her career, Barry's portrayal of Hellena in Aphra Behn's comedy *The Rover* (1677) launched the character type of the female libertine, a role that helped make Barry famous when the play opened. Hellena, as a young, aristocratic woman who, having been raised in a convent and designated by her family for a life of enforced chastity as a nun, appears to fit into the patriarchal social hierarchy. But Hellena has other, very different, plans for herself—plans that promise to entertain the audience and break the rules. In the first act, upon musing with her sister and cousin about whether or not she would become a nun, Hellena states sarcastically, "Faith no, sister" (Behn 591-592). Through the course of the play, Hellena reveals herself as something new to Restoration audience—the female libertine or, as she introduces herself: "I am called Hellena the Inconstant" (Behn 643). Hellena's role is that of a respectable, if wild, aristocratic woman who poses as a gypsy to attract Willmore, the rake-hero of the title. Throughout the play, Hellena emanates a light-hearted and witty style of repartee, showing herself confidently and comfortably equal to any man. As a female rake hero, Hellena presents a radical challenge to prescribed gender roles of the time by breaking the contemporary female stereotypes and presenting herself as an intelligent, outspoken, virtuous, and lustful virgin.

It is easy to imagine why Barry flourished in the role of Hellena, a character who was, by far, the most savvy, manipulative, and intelligent character in the play, qualities that in real life it is safe to assume that Barry possessed. Howe calls Hellena "the most attractive heroine of the decade" next to Harriet in *The Man of Mode* and states that the role of Hellena made Barry the leading actress of the Duke's company for the next ten

years (80-81). Barry as Hellena was every bit the challenge for Willmore, the rake hero, who embodies all the characteristics of the male libertine. Behn purposefully named Willmore similarly to Barry's real-life lover and patron, John Wilmot, a notorious rake who was married to another woman. Just as Hellena enticed Willmore, Barry attracted Wilmot, but unlike Hellena, Barry did not marry Wilmot; rather she became his mistress for a number of years. Likewise, the character Hellena resists marriage—in principle. But Hellena also sees marriage as protection against societal scorn, just as her virtue (that is, her virginity) and her dowry are also protections. Triply-endowed with fortune, virtue, and sex appeal, Hellena is an interesting and challenging match for Willmore. Hellena's position as a female libertine was, however, an aberration that created problems in the Restoration audiences' expectations. What could a female libertine do to survive in seventeenth-century society? Nothing. In fact, in the opening scene of *The Rover Part II*, written by Behn and first performed in 1681, the audience learns that Hellena's character has died. In this sequel to *The Rover*, Barry played the role of a courtesan, the beautiful La Nuche who, like Hellena, also falls in love with the rake Willmore. La Nuche tames Willmore's libertinism, abandons her profession as prostitute, and lives with him ever after shockingly unwedded bliss. In real life, however, Elizabeth Barry eventually left Wilmot and went on to even greater acclaim as an actress in the 1680s, 1690s, and early eighteenth century, as I shall detail in chapter 3.

* * *

Moving into the 1680s, the ideology of libertinism so evident on the Restoration stage began to decline, as did the theater itself. The decline in new plays and performances was partly due to diminished support by the monarchy after the death of Charles II in 1685. Charles' brother and successor, James II, enjoyed the theater, but he was not as avid a fan as Charles was. Furthermore, James did not possess charisma enough to drive London's social scene. While drama in London continued during James' reign, for a period there was only one playhouse. Marsden suggests that due to lack of audience support, demand was down and one playhouse was sufficient (19). Furthermore, the public reacted to James' Catholic leanings with anxiety and criticism against the Stuart ideology instilled during the Restoration period. Thus, the libertine rhetoric of the Restoration theater sparked heated critical response from religious factions who began a campaign of silencing that continued into the early eighteenth century.

The changing cultural context of London at this time is illustrated in the story of Aphra Behn's fall to obscurity. During the reign of James, Aphra Behn continued to write female-focused drama until her death in 1689. Yet Todd notes that, by the end of the seventeenth century, Behn's writing with its "principles of frankness in men and women" was falling into disfavor, being replaced by "feminine modesty and masculine condescension," and "in the centuries that followed she was silenced less by abuse than by a neglect deriving from disgust" (1). The aversion to Aphra Behn was not due to a lack of recognition by her artistic peers; to the contrary, textual evidence shows that early eighteenth-century writers such as Thomas Southerne and Gerard Langbaine held Behn in high esteem. Behn's fall to obscurity was rather a problem of changing public tastes.

Although recent criticism has made much of Behn's aligning herself with the prostitute, Angellica Bianca, from *The Rover Part I*, Behn's fate as a writer was more like that of her female libertine character, Hellena. Out of place in their changing societies, both Hellena and Behn faded from memory. With the rise of she-tragedy in the Post-restoration period, followed by the sentimental novel of the eighteenth century and realism in the nineteenth century, female suffering never really went out of style, but female libertinism did. When Aphra Behn died in 1689, a year after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, the much more conservative court of William and Mary was taking power in London. And, while libertinism was no longer in vogue, actresses in the Post-restoration period were still all the rage.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT: FEMALE RHETORIC ON THE POST-RESTORATION STAGE

By the late 1680s, England was undergoing major changes on many fronts: political, philosophical, and economic. Among the most obvious was the change in monarchy. Unlike Charles II, James II (1685-1688) was not a popular monarch. When James' second wife, the Catholic Maria of Modena, gave birth to a son, political pressures forced James to step down and prompted his daughter Mary and her Dutch husband William of Orange, both Protestants, to ascend the throne in the Glorious (or Bloodless) Revolution of 1688. This event began an era of transition in English history that encompassed the years 1688 – 1714 and included the reign of William III and Mary II from 1689 to 1702, followed by that of Anne, the last of the Stuarts, from 1702-1714. In addition to the shift from Catholic-sympathizing James II to the solidly Protestant monarchy of William and Mary, the period saw the increasing popularity of Whig politics and prominence of the merchant citizen class. Furthermore, although the succession of Anne in 1702 brought hope to the Tory royalists for a return to Stuart Absolutism, the trend toward increasing Parliamentary rule, especially in the area of foreign policy, continued during her reign. Shifts in political and economic power affected the dominant ideology of London as well as its social life. This chapter will examine how political, ideological, and social change during this period quickly propelled female-focused

rhetoric to the forefront of the London stage and how factions within the public domain reacted with alarm to the female intrusion on public space.

After the Glorious revolution, the public mood once again became optimistic with the new monarchy, and conditions for the commercial success of theatrical production became more favorable. Theater attendance began to increase. As Marsden notes, after 1695, audiences increased enough to support two London playhouses again, but the social climate had changed under the leadership of a Whig government strongly connected to merchants and citizens, the very people who had been the mockery of the royalist Restoration plays; in this new social climate, the project of “reforming manners was of a national concern” (19-20). Thus, while the theater increased in popularity in the 1690s, the theatrical world and its moral laxity increasingly came under fire by the public. Another change was that the theater was no longer a major interest of the monarchy and, therefore, the dramatists and theater companies did not enjoy the royal patronage they had during the Restoration years. Howe states that “lack of court support rendered the stage more vulnerable to attacks by moralists... Indictments were gained against players for speaking licentious or blasphemous lines and Jeremy Collier’s notorious diatribe...put both theatres on the defensive” (7). These changes in the monarchy’s relation to the theater and the rising moral barometer were early indications of how ideological change in eighteenth-century England would impact the theater and literature in general.

Shifting Power, Changing Ideology

The Glorious Revolution of 1688 symbolized a new worldview, one that allowed unsatisfactory monarchs to be dethroned and replaced according to the will the people—without war and without recourse. As historian James Sambrook describes, this emerging ideology in England in the 1680s was highly influenced by two different sources: one was John Locke’s “contract theory,” which posits that sovereigns are chosen and granted power by the people of a society rather than by any divine right, and the other was “the Gothic notion of elective monarchy”; together these influences allowed the public to “refute divine right and to justify resistance to absolutism” (89). Inherent especially in the Lockean influence is the idea that each person in a society has rights and is entitled to freedom. As Marsden notes, “with the ascension of William of Orange, the government and ultimately the social order were re-imagined as Locke had demonstrated in his *Two Treatises on Government* (1690)” (51-52). Yet, as Canfield asserts, political change did not result in an abrupt “middle-class revolution;” rather aristocratic power remained intact, the government supported new relationships between aristocrats and the increasingly wealthy merchant class, and the period saw an economic boom characterized by a rise trade in which “the moneyed interests” gradually “came to dominate landed interests” (xiv-xv). With this change, merchants and business people took on increasing importance in London society, as did their influence on public perception.

The public sphere emerged as an intersection between the political structures and the upwardly-mobile middle-class community. As Jurgen Habermas states, “Forces endeavoring to influence the decisions of state authority appealed to the critical public in

order to legitimate demands” (57). The new critical public began openly dialoging about current issues in places such as coffee houses, salons, theaters, and concert halls. In England, the abrupt transformation from general public to bourgeois public occurred, Habermas states, in “the post-revolutionary phase, marked by the transition from Dryden’s comedies to the dramas of Congreve” when the audience changed from one dominated by a coterie to a general amalgam of the new bourgeois cultured class (39). Although Habermas marks the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere as beginning after 1688 and in its full bloom by the mid 1800s, centuries of change and performances led up to this transformation, which was as much a legacy as a turnabout from the previous strictures of feudalism, patriarchy, and the private economies of the household. According to Habermas, the new practice of public debate by private citizens was patterned after “the patriarchal conjugal family” and “this family type...for which centuries of transformations toward capitalism paved the way—consolidated itself as the dominant type within the bourgeois strata” (44). This modern nuclear family, then, resulted from the phenomenon of the rising middle class and its economic aspirations. However, in the new model of the nuclear family, the foundations of the patriarchal system remained intact: the male-headed family was still the primary financial institution, and primogeniture and female chastity remained enforced rules.

Regarding the concerns of feminism during this time, unfortunately we can apply the old adage: the more things change, the more they stay the same. Despite the conceptual decline of aristocratic patriarchy and rise to prominence of individual merit, the role of the female in society remained cast in the status quo. As Rosenthal points out,

by the late seventeenth century, although the model of absolute patriarchy as depicted in Sir Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* (1680) had begun to decline and the right of a woman to choose her husband became more of a possibility, the new ideology of power inscribed by the Lockean social contract did not apply to marriage and actually ended up subordinating the female (205-206). Lockean philosophy did not support the same contractual relationship between man and wife as it advanced for political leaders and citizens. In effect, women remained politically powerless and became even more economically powerless than they had been in the system of traditional patriarchy.

The stage reflected these ideological changes, as female characters became, more than ever, the chief commodity—a product to be bartered in the institution of marriage. Thus the themes of family, patriarchy and primogeniture, while reshaped, continued after the Glorious Revolution of 1688, along with new economic themes reflective of the growth of capitalism. As several recent studies have noted, by the early eighteenth century, Lockean philosophy combined with the notion of the actress as a rhetorical commodity inspired new readings on the theme of marriage in both comedy and tragedy (Marsden; Canfield; Rosenthal). Marsden identifies a central theme of newly produced drama in the 1690s as “social contracts, both domestic and political” (52). Canfield states that comedies and satires in the new bourgeois order continue to “attack the institution of marriage” because, with all the so-called equities brought to society through the Lockean social contract, the customs of patriarchal lineage to determine family and the transference of wealth do not change; thus “women remain the sacred transmitters and must therefore be chaste—and monogamous” (xvi). The continued subordinate status of

women in marriage, an institution supposedly based on a contractual relationship, created a conundrum ripe for dramatic critique. For centuries, English literature had made comparisons between the head of the state and the head of the household. But playwrights saw incongruity between the new Lockean model of the relationship between government and citizens and the old patriarchal model between husband and wife. As a female character in Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage* tells her husband of her subordinate and powerless status, "I can live no longer under your Tyrannical Government" (21). During this era of history, the notion of a woman's right to choose could refer to her decision whether or not to abide by the customs of marriage. What were her options if she chose not to? Divorce was nearly impossible for a woman to obtain. As Canfield states, "some satires close with women standing alone in bas relief, their marital problems unresolved and unresolvable. (xvi). Yet, Rosenthal notes that the theater depicts the subordination of the female in marriage as "illusory" and hints that the inability to completely subjugate female characters is the result of the inequitable marriage contract (206). Thus, post-restoration drama continues the project begun in Restoration drama of exploring the circumstances of the female, but the period digs deeper in its grappling with the disparity between ideology and the reality of women as individuals living in an increasingly contractually-controlled society. The female-focused thematic concerns of the Post-restoration speakers may have rung true with the audience, but the frank portrayal of women's issues in many dramas was also at odds with the emerging polite bourgeois ideology. In other words, female bodies onstage were causing too much of an emphasis on sexuality in a society where moral authority was gaining ground on artistic

freedom. The artists were going out of the bounds of the new decorum, but it would take an uproar to reel them in.

Turn-of-the-century Audiences and Anti-theatrical Influences

At the end of the seventeenth century, attendance of the theater was again on the increase, and audiences continued to be a vocal, and sometimes disruptive, presence. After Charles II's death, the spectators once again began the custom of sitting on the stage despite a royal command by Queen Anne in 1704, which stated that "no person of what quality soever presume to go behind the scenes or come upon the stage" (Summers 60).²³ As Farquhar noted in 1702, "The rules of English Comedy don't lie in the compass of Aristotle ...but in the pit, box, and galleries" (quoted in Styan 11). This statement, which had been true in the Restoration period, was still true, but audience expectations and tastes were changing.

Critical response to the drama of the 1690s and early 1700s foreshadowed the direction that theater would take in the early Georgian period. Theater historians often couch the increasingly moralistic tone of theater criticism as the result of the public's negative reactions to both the Restoration court's licentiousness and the amorality of the Hobbesian libertinism that had come to dominate the atmosphere of the King's and the Duke's theater companies. Most exemplary of this moralistic and corrective mood is

²³ Summers states that audiences continued to invade the stage until around 1763 when, with changes in stage and scenery design, famed actor and theater owner David Garrick was successful in restricting the stage to actors only (60).

Jeremy Collier's famous pamphlet, *A Short View of the Immorality, and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698). One of Collier's chief concerns was how indecency on the stage affected the audience, particularly the females in the audience. Among many other claims, Collier argued that depicting lewd conversations and behavior on stage was an insult to females in the audience: on the one hand. Collier's position was that, on one hand, an insinuation that women enjoyed lewdness was an insult to their virtue, and, on the other hand, if women did not enjoy the lewdness, such displays were just blatantly offensive (Anthony 4-6). Collier wrote, "Modesty was design'd by Providence as a Guard to Virtue; And that it might always be at Hand, 'tis wrought into the Mechanism of the Body. 'Tis likewise proportioned to the occasions of Life, and the strongest in Youth when Passion is so too" (Anthony 11). His fear was that theater would corrupt the young by encouraging their passions and discouraging their natural modesty.

Collier described both indirect and direct ways that playwrights created indecent female performance: the frequent portrayal of female characters as silly or mad served an indirect device for enabling actresses to take improper liberties through the cover of their performance, and, more directly, the recitation of lewd prologues, dedications, and epilogues was even worse (Anthony 31). As Collier's protest represents, early eighteenth-century public reaction to theater was tinged with anxiety and worry about the unseemly influence that overtly sexual themes might have—particularly on the female population. Marsden describes the slippery slope argument: "uncontrolled female [sexual] appetites could result in the downfall of the emerging British Empire. Dramatic representation of transgressive sexual behavior could, it was feared, set a bad example and influence

otherwise virtuous women in the theater audience, in effect shattering national security” (5). While this argument is extremely slippery, its appeal to fear is powerful. Not only moralists but the majority of the wealthy class of eighteenth-century England saw female chastity and the system of primogeniture as a means of ensuring that property was preserved by the family from generation to generation; thus, it followed that the preservation of family wealth and property ensured the preservation of the nation. Violations of chastity, meant questionable patrilineal descent and the disintegration of established families, and the demise of the nation. Of course, not everybody agreed that risqué and sexually-titillating stage performances would lead to such catastrophes.

The many sides of the argument that Collier sparked with his *Short View* are superbly captured by Sister Rose Anthony in her 1938 dissertation, *The Jeremy Collier Stage Controversy*. Underlying the moral argument was the political argument. Anthony writes of Collier’s diatribe, “The attack was equivalent to his hurling a dart at the profligacy of the Stuart dynasty” (26). Many, but not all, of the playwrights attacked were associated with the Restoration libertinism. Anthony also notes that Collier’s critique is targeted at those “best able to defend themselves,” that is, the most commercially successful, powerful, living, male, playwrights, including Congreve, Dryden, Vanbrugh, and Wycherley; Anthony also states that “For some reason best known to himself he [Collier] does not attack women dramatists; he does not even mention Mrs. Behn who was certainly entitled to his ire. Neither does he refer to the plays of Mrs. Manley, Mrs. Pix, and Mrs. Trotter” (28). Collier’s views represented one side of the argument; however, *A Short View* sparked an ongoing debate; counter-

arguments in the forms of published letters and pamphlets from various theatrical personages, such as Charles Gildon, John Dennis, and a number of playwrights, including Congreve, Shadwell, Dryden, and Centlivre came out defending the stage.

But Collier's concerns were valid to many people at that time and indicated a real disconnect between the speakers (playwrights and players) and the audiences' changing tastes. The many noted concerns of offending the ladies in the audience are not just moralist posturing but represent a shift from the public mood of libertinism to one of propriety and decorum. As Cibber observed in reference to censorship in 1697:

Libertines of mere Wit, and Pleasure, may laugh at these grave Laws, that would limit a lively Genius;...But while our Authors took these extraordinary Liberties with their Wit, I remember, the Ladies were then observ'd, to be decently afraid of venturing bare-fac'd to a new Comedy, 'till they had been assur'd they might do it, without the Risque of an Insult to their Modesty (155).

Cibber's observation characterizes the female audiences' habit of wearing masks as sign of their desire to disassociate themselves from potential displays of immorality even as they came to the theater partake in the performances. Cibber later notes that Collier's attack, although overblown, had a wholesome effect on the theatre and that, by the early 18th century, "the Fair Sex came again to fill the Boxes, on the first Day of a new Comedy, without Fear or Censure" (160). Collier's critique appears to have provided the impetus for reforming the morality on the stage. Summers notes, that if not in reaction

to, at least in congruency with Collier's critique of the licentiousness of the stage, Queen Anne issued a decree in 1704, published on January 24 in the *Daily Courant*, which stated that "being further desirous to reform all other indecencies and abuses of the stage,... We do hereby strictly command, that no person of what quality soever presume to go behind the scenes, or come upon the stage ... [and] that no woman be allowed...to wear a vizard mask in either of the Theatres" (90-91). Queen Anne's proclamation indicates the level of concern that London society had for what was seen as the laxity of moral behavior in the playhouses. It is unclear, however, whether the queen's decree was strictly followed.

What is clear, however, is that, by the early eighteenth-century, the changing morality of London society became apparent in spectators' and critics' changing tastes. Canfield characterizes the change as a move toward benevolence, sentiment, and an anti-aristocratic "bourgeois theory that demands purity" and decorum, an ideology that aimed to "cleanse the stage" by eradicating immoral and vulgar behavior (xv-xvi). These ideological changes of the eighteenth century certainly can and have been read as a feminizing of culture (Staves, Howe, Canfield). This feminization, often identified with sensibility and sentimentalism, has been well documented in both literary and rhetorical studies of the later eighteenth century, particularly in relation to the rise of the sentimental novel (Todd, *Sensibility*; Goring). Sentimentalism actually started as a literary movement within the early eighteenth-century theater, several decades before the novel, as Paul Goring has shown in his recent book *The Rhetoric of Sensibility*. Goring exposes early, pre-novel evidence of the feminizing trend toward decorum and politeness within the theater beginning in the 1720s, a period which I shall discuss further in chapter

4. But it would be inaccurate to think that, as soon as the strains of sensibility emerged among spectators and critics, the theater immediately dropped Restoration ideology and its celebration of libertinism. On the contrary, the public exerted a great deal of pressure before libertinism was eradicated from the stage.

Performing Sexuality, Suffering, and Difference

Even though post-Restoration society began moving in a more socially conservative direction in the 1680s and 90s, actresses on stage continued to pique public curiosity about female sexuality. As a result of conflicting ideological and artistic forces, the 1690s saw a theatrical rhetoric characterized by simultaneous tendencies to display and suppress female sexuality. The conflict centered on the female body on stage—a rich cite for both feminist and misogynist rhetoric. Noting that “the distinction between active and passive sexuality becomes increasingly important as the eighteenth century progresses,” Marsden poses two rhetorical questions in the introduction to *Fatal Desire: Women, Sexuality, and the English Stage 1660-1720*—questions that she sees as crucial in eighteenth-century drama and I see as crucial to feminist historical rhetoric: first, did eighteenth-century women feel sexual desire, and, secondly, did they act on their sexual desires? (10-11). These questions are answered on the stage, through the performances of skilled actresses, through new female character types, and through new genres of tragedy and comedy by male and female playwrights.

The late 1680s, the 1690s, and first decade of the eighteenth century saw the publication of some brilliant plays focused on female leads and/or witty couples. During

this period, the male playwrights were writing both tragic and comic female parts with the great actresses as their muses. Some of the most memorable female roles of the period—Monimia in *The Orphan*, Belvidira in *Venice Preserved*, Millamant in *Way of the World*, Isabella in *The Fatal Marriage*, Melantha in *Marriage a la Mode*, and Mrs. Sullen in *The Beaux's Stratagem*—were the result of the collaboration between Otway, Congreve, Southerne, Cibber, and Farquhar and the leading actresses who included Elizabeth Barry, Anne Bracegirdle, Susannah Mountfort Verbruggen, and Anne Oldfield, among others. In addition, another category of female voice at the turn of the century was the female playwright. Following the trail blazed by Aphra Behn were Mary Pix, Catherine Trotter, and Delarivier Manley. The double female speakers that formed between the female playwrights and the actresses created an even greater feminine authenticity. For example, Rebecca Merrens notes that Delarivier Manley's *The Royal Mischief* and Catherine Trotter's *The Fatal Friendship* “disrupt conventional associations between women and social disorder” as they “reject [the] repressive tradition of blaming women for sociopolitical strife and, instead, locate the source of tragedy explicitly within the contradictions and violence of patrilineal order” (32). Although the female playwrights of the period are not as well known today as the males, they were popular in their own time. Langbaine described Mary Pix as “a lady yet living, and in this Poetic Age, when all Sexes and Degrees venture on the sock or Buskins, she has boldly given us an Essay of her Talent” (111).²⁴ Considering the productivity of female as well as male

²⁴ For full-scale studies of eighteenth-century female playwrights, see Pearson's *The Prostituted*

playwrights in addition to the performances of the male and female players and the men and women in the audience, the Post-restoration theater was truly a mixed-gender rhetorical venue from all perspectives.

The feminine influence on the theater as a rhetorical venue was also apparent in the content of the new plays written in the 1690s and early 1700s. Notably, the sexuality of the actress combined with the public's demand for female performance had a transformative effect on tragedy as seen in a shift from the male-dominated heroic tragedies of the 1660s to pathetic tragedies in the 1670s and 1680s and the emergence in the 1690s of the highly popular genre known as *she-tragedy* (Howe 108). Marsden describes the genre as emerging in the 1690s "with the emphasis on pathos, a property contemporary writers referred to as 'distress'," which was characterized by "emotional and sometimes physical suffering inflicted on blameless victims who are almost inevitably female" (61). Examples of the she-tragedy genre include Otway's *The Orphan* and *Venice Preserved*, Southerne's *The Fatal Marriage*, and Rowe's *The Fair Penitent* and *The Tragedy of Jane Shore*. The beginnings of she-tragedy are most noticeable in the early works of Thomas Otway, which all starred the great tragedienne, Elizabeth Barry. Barry perfected the pathetic mode of she-tragedy and its hallmark character type: the suffering female. (I describe Barry's contribution to she-tragedy in more detail in the subsection on Elizabeth Barry in this chapter.)

The connection between the actress and she-tragedy is irrefutable. Yet, in 1992, Howe notes that the actresses' influence on the development of the she-tragedy has been "surprisingly neglected" by theater historians; she lists the "other" cultural reasons for the rise of she-tragedy, including disillusionment with the Restored monarchy and patriarchal ideals, as well as the desire to explore women as moral models (108-109). These other cultural influencers of she-tragedy are also valid; nevertheless, the failure to recognize the actress as the main impetus of she-tragedy has resulted in yet another barrier to recognizing the actresses' rhetorical impact in Enlightenment society. Finally in 2006, answering the omission in theater history, Jean Marsden's *Fatal Desire* offers a full-scale semiotic examination of the actress in she-tragedy. Marsden notes that, by the end of the seventeenth century, "drama took on female face" and that "the female image was both actress and character, a socially charged emblem comprised of flesh and blood" (15-16). (The notion of actress as social emblem is important not only to the rise of she-tragedy but as a bodily rhetorical trope and as a strong female appeal to pathos.) Marsden agrees with Howe that she-tragedy has been "overlooked and denigrated," she says, because modern critics view its extreme emphasis on pathos as an "overt emotional appeal," which is by definition, somehow, "unliterary" (13). This stance for minimizing the artistic importance of pathos is easily debunked today. In literary circles, one needs only to point to the myriad of contemporary studies centering on eighteenth-century sentimental novels and, in popular culture, to the great success of prime-time tear-jerker serials, such as *Grey's Anatomy*. An argument in favor of the artistic power and

importance of she-tragedy is its great success on stage, not only as first-run performance but as repertoire performance in London theaters throughout the eighteenth century.

The rise of the she-tragedy genre also should be contextualized as feminist historical rhetoric, particularly as a genre of the re-gendered canon of delivery. Certainly, the cultural forces that caused the decline of heroic tragedy and the rise of the she-tragedy have sociopolitical origins, feminist implications, and rhetorical results. The importance of she-tragedy to feminist historical rhetoric is two-fold: first, it enacted yet another female-centered performative response to cultural exigencies related to dysfunctions in patriarchy, and, secondly, it required actresses to develop specialized skills of delivery—skills that communicated female suffering and heightened to the greatest possible degree the audience's pathetic response. The details of delivery of the she-tragedy's suffering female were not specifically documented during the time in which these plays were produced, so the work of historiography is needed to re-vision the techniques used. One source for revisioning is Gildon's study of elocutionary practices, which describes a variety of techniques to communicate profound suffering. According to Gildon, a pale countenance "betrays Grief, Sorrow, and Fear" (45), the "hanging down of the Head is the Consequence of Grief and Sorrow" (43), a "small trembling voice proceeds from Fear" (42), "the lifting up both Hands on high" expresses misery (46), and "eyes drowned in Tears [to] discover the most vehement and cruel Grief, which is not capable of Ease ev'n from Tears themselves" is, perhaps, the deepest expression of sorrow (44). These expressions, gestures, and styles of speech that an actress could employ in the role of a

suffering heroine were developed in quite a number of plays, especially by the great Elizabeth Barry, as shall be seen later in this chapter.

Tragic heroines were not the only female roles transforming the stage. In an age of consummate wit and wittiness, female themes and characters also began to dominate comedy. As it was during the Restoration period, the comic genre of choice was still the comedy of manners, which continued in the intellectual vein of high comedy (as opposed to the low comedy of burlesque, which would be seen a few decades later) but plots and themes took a decidedly female turn. As Canfield notes, comedy became “less about the socializing of the centrifugal sexual energy of the male rake than the socializing of the centrifugal sexual energy of the female coquette (xv). The most famous coquette role of the period was Millamant in Congreve’s *Way of the World* (1700). Played by Anne Bracegirdle, Millamant was a transitional character who imbued both the flippant witticism of the Restoration mood and an exaggerated and satirized decorum symbolizing the new concern for moral propriety. It was not uncommon for characters of the 1690s to possess gender traits that were a throwback to the decades of libertinism. For example, the cross-dressed female rake character of the title role in Southerne’s *Sir Anthony Love* (1690) is, perhaps, the female role that pushed the libertine limits of gender furthest. But, by the early 1700s, many comedies began to shift from overt to more modest displays of sexuality, and onstage sexual interaction and conflict moved away from direct, physical confrontation, threatened violence and force to questions of legality, propriety, and commerce. Pix’s *The Beau Defeated* is an example of this shift. Decorum and manners were becoming more and more important. Yet, onstage sexual energy persisted with the

revival of the witty couple, especially as seen in the plays by Farquhar, such as *The Recruiting Officer* (1706) and *The Beaux's Stratagem* (1707).

Also notable in early eighteenth-century comedy, the anti-bourgeois undertones that had been present in Restoration comedy were matched and eventually superseded by anti-aristocratic undertones, another shift that influenced the comic rhetoric about femaleness. In "Resisting a Private Tyranny in Two Humane Comedies," James Evans notes that comedies in the decades following the Glorious Revolution "explore ways that questions about liberty in married life relate to answers provided to those questions in the public sphere" (151). Evans discusses how the overtly feminist Enlightenment rhetoric present in Mary Astell's incisive, and anti-Lockean, "Some Reflections on Marriage" is covertly performed in the humane comedy of the first decade of the eighteenth century. Citing Ruth Perry's excellent study of Mary Astell, Evans points out that Astell's critique of Locke takes issue with his ideas of possessive individualism and the "paradigm shift from a political world populated by men and women involved in a web of familial and sexual interconnections to an all-male world based solely on contractual obligations" (Perry 449-450). Then citing over a dozen critical studies of British Enlightenment drama and theater, Evans supports the increasing popularity of humane comedy as a specialized, female-focused early-eighteenth-century dramatic genre. For examples of humane comedy, Evans discusses two popular plays that dealt heavily with the issue of the female's position in marriage: Congreve's *The Way of the World* and Farquhar's *The Beaux's Stratagem*. Evans' article is germane for feminist rhetoric of the theater in offering both primary and secondary textual evidence that the "rhetoric of liberty," often

associated with the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the new British government, “brought no increase in the liberty of women and, indeed, probably made them more vulnerable because of its emphasis on the contractual basis of society” (151). Evans rightly points out the paradoxical aspects of the Lockean rhetoric of freedom and social contract, which should but do not hold true, when applied to questions of patriarchy and gender are deconstructed in the humane comedy of the early eighteenth century. Without the public visibility of the actresses, the drama of the period would not have enabled such an effect.

Concerns about equality of gender and contradictions between the bourgeois ideology and the realities of society were also cleverly exposed in the prologues and epilogues at the turn of the century. In these direct addresses to the audience, the speakers often presented humorous extended metaphors about current events and ideas to demonstrate wit and establish rapport with the audience.²⁵ Many prologues and epilogues refer specifically to female spectators and players, as well as issues of sexuality, through metaphors of contracts, commerce and trade. For example, in 1689, the prologue to Aphra Behn’s *The Widow Ranter* compares the audience, including the females, to images of mercantilism:

Plays you will have; and to supply your Store,
Our Poets trade to ev’ry Foreign Shore;

²⁵ Emmet L. Avery notes that, especially at the premiere of a new drama, the poet and the player in the speaking of prologues and epilogues, the poet and the player stood together as one speaker whose chief aim was to introduce the play and positively influence the audience in its favor (236).

This is the Product of Virginian Ground,
 And to the Port of Covent-Garden bound,
 Our Cargo is, or should at least, be Wit:
 Bless us from you damn'd Pyrates of the Pit;
 And Vizard-Masks, those dreadful Apparitions;
 She-Privateers, of Venomous Conditions,
 That clap us oft aboard with French Commissions (Avery 224-225).

In addition to the foregrounded metaphors of sea-faring mercantilism, Behn's epilogue is rife with thinly-veiled double entendre and innuendo, especially in relation to female sexuality. The play itself, as a "product of Virginian ground," symbolizes as a virgin ready to be enjoyed, as it were, by the public in the "Port of Covent Garden." The synecdoche of the vizard masks for the female spectators and their further comparison to "She-Privateers" who would speak venom about a play and thereby infect the work with the venereal clap is particularly creative and nasty imagery directed, albeit humorously, at the "ladies" in the audience.

In addition to jibes at the vizard-wearing females in the audience, prologues and epilogues continued to model current perceptions about the personal lives of the actresses. In the epilogue of *Sir Anthony Love*, a play that, for the most part, can be read

as having a feminist message, the sexually suggestive epilogue is spoken by actress Charlotte Butler²⁶ who says of herself:

Fam'd Butler's Wiles are now so common grown

That by each Feather'd Cully she is known

... ..

But if She's hungry, faith I must be blunt

Sh'l for a Dish of Cutlets shew her C—t. (Howe 61)

We might wonder how Butler felt delivering these words about herself? This bawdy kind of speech, typical at the close of a sexually-charged comedy like *Sir Anthony Love*, was designed to make the audience leave the theater chuckling and bring them back again for another night. Although the audience was endeared by this kind of personal interaction with actresses, the distasteful metaphor of Butler as a piece of meat serves to close the play with a blatant nod to misogyny. Examples such as this show that a derogatory view of the moral character of actresses was certainly prevalent, but it is simply inaccurate to reduce the actress to the singular image of the whore.

²⁶ Charlotte Butler was a very popular actress who was known for licentious behavior offstage. However, Cibber calls Mrs. Butler a good actress gifted with the ability to “sing and dance to great Perfection. In speaking too, she had a sweet-ton'd Voice, which, with her naturally genteel Air, and sensible Pronunciation, render'd her wholly Mistress of the Amiable” in both serious and comic roles (97).

Revisioning Actresses in an Era of Change

By 1688, women had been performing in London's public theaters for almost thirty years. The early actresses had established a repertoire of female character types, such as the witty heroine, the coquette, the female libertine, and the female fop, which modeled back to the public the flippant and risqué aristocratic values of their era. While repertoire performances of these earlier plays show that they remained popular; by the late 1680s, after the lull of the earlier decade was over and theatrical production picked up again, the audience was ready for something new from the actresses. Luckily, at this time, the theater was populated by a variety of uniquely talented actresses who were extremely popular with the public. In the last two decades of the seventeenth century, despite ideological upheaval and changing public tastes, actresses continued to inspire new theatrical directions in the playwrights and to help create new theatrical genres and female character types. The actresses' rhetorical impact exceeded the boundaries of the stage, ultimately affecting the way women were perceived in society, as I shall describe in the upcoming sections on individual actresses in this chapter.

Cibber notes that by 1690 the principal actresses in the united company were as follows: Mrs. Betterton, Mrs. Barry, Mrs. Leigh, Mrs. Butler, Mrs. Mountfort, Mrs. Bracegirdle. With the exception of top-grossers Barry and Bracegirdle, the actresses were frequently not paid as well as the male actors. They were, however, equally as popular and skilled. In fact, in Gildon's discussion on the delivery skills needed by actors, his contemporary models for excellence include Mrs. Barry for tragic acting and Mrs. Bracegirdle and Mrs. Mountfort for comedy. Likewise, Cibber states that the actresses of

the 1690s, along with the male actors of the period, were unequalled by those on any stage of any period in European history, and goes on to say that, even if others do not agree with him about the particular excellencies and superiority of these players, his descriptions of their talents could serve as general guidelines for what capabilities are needed and valuable in the actors of an acting company (103). The actresses that Cibber speaks of include Elizabeth Barry, Ann Bracegirdle, and Susannah Mountfort Verbruggen, among others. Many of these same actresses continued their work into the first decade of the eighteenth century, during the reign of Queen Anne, and were joined by a new crop of actresses, most notably Anne Oldfield. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to describing the rhetorical careers of the most prominent actresses following the Glorious Revolution of 1688 up until 1714, the last year before the Hanoverian succession.

Elizabeth Barry: Her Height of Fame

The career of Elizabeth Barry from the 1680s until her retirement in 1710 is one of the greatest professional female success stories of the early eighteenth century. She broke the patriarchal mold of the female as either virgin, wife, or whore; she transcended her early image of witty Restoration comic heroine; and, at the height of her fame, through the power of her performances, she invented a new dramatic model of female psychological realism on the stage. For this achievement, despite critics and detractors, she garnered a level of public acclaim unprecedented for a performer. In the 1680s, Barry became the first actor (male or female) to be granted a benefit performance in

which she alone received all of the night's profits, a perk that no other performer received before 1695 and one that made her annual salary exceed even the top paid actor, Thomas Betterton. She also had responsibilities for collecting the acting company's pay from the Lord Chamberlain and distributing it to players; and in 1695 Barry, Thomas Betterton and Ann Bracegirdle, successfully petitioned the King to be able to form their own theater company in which they were the principal owners (Howe 28-30).

Beginning in the 1680s, Barry's acting talent took this new trajectory as she developed her specialty in tragedy, the genre that she helped to feminize into she-tragedy. Her first noted tragic performance was in the role of Monimia in Thomas Otway's *The Orphan* in 1680, followed in 1682 by her creation of Belvidera, the suffering wife, in Otway's greatest tragedy, *Venice Preserved*. Although Belvidera was not the lead character in the play, her role was, perhaps, the most pathetic. She was truly a helpless victim caught in the political and social machinations of the plot. Critics and biographers have noted how Otway's real life unrequited love for Barry formed her as his tragic muse²⁷ (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:315-316). Howe goes as far to say that Barry's influence on Otway is what caused the focus of tragedy to shift from the hero to the heroine (113). Inspired by Barry's incredible gift for arousing pathos in the audience, other playwrights began writing plays for her tragic acting skills. Thomas Southerne, for

²⁷ Otway's feelings for Barry are proven beyond a doubt by the expression of his tortured passions in five letters written to her sometime in the early 1680s. Otway's letters to Barry were first published anonymously in 1697 and later attributed to Otway in 1713.

example, designed his most successful tragedy, *The Fatal Marriage* (1694), specifically for the talents of Barry. In his dedication, Southerne writes of Mrs. Barry, “I made the play for her part, and her part has made the Play for me;...by her power, and spirit of playing, she has breath’d a soul into it” (Jordan and Love 10-11). High praise from critics and the public further make clear Barry’s contribution to the successful initial run of *The Fatal Marriage*. Jordan and Love cite a number of contemporary reviews of the play, including a letter from a member of the Windham family of Felbrigg, which states “I never saw Mrs. Barry act with so much passion as she does in it; I could not forbear being moved even to tears to see her act” (5). Southerne’s remarks and the high praise that Barry received from critics and the public make clear the extent of the actress’ influence on tragedy went far beyond her initial connection with Otway to encompass a wide audience of fans who were captivated and moved by her performances. Any feminist revision of the rhetoric of the Restoration period must not ignore Barry’s rhetorical impact on her society through her portrayal of the suffering female on stage.

Barry’s public performance of female emotion was instrumental in bringing attention to the dehumanizing aspects of patriarchy. In her roles, Barry posed an argument for noticing and sympathizing with females, particularly suffering females, in a male-dominated society. With her pathetic style established, Barry became renowned for playing prostitutes and mistresses as sympathetic characters often thrust into unjust situations in both comedy and tragedy. As pointed out by Howe, Barry’s work gave focus to the sexual double-standard in English society:

It was only when Barry's mesmeric talents were employed in the portrayal of prostitutes and mistresses that their problematic situation was given detailed consideration and their sufferings vividly realized... Thanks to Barry, the prostitute and the mistress became a source of conflict and debate in the theatre and so contributed to the fresh upsurge of interest in women and women's problems at the end of the century (130).

Barry's portrayals of women outside the margins of respectability showed them as individuals whose problems were prescribed by social circumstance. Her dramatic rhetoric in its depiction of social injustice was persuasive in an indirect and artistic context, different from the direct persuasive appeals of the classical orator, the fundamentalist preacher, or the even the nineteenth-century female suffragette, but persuasive nonetheless.

After developing her specialty in portraying female suffering, Barry switched from playing light-hearted Hellena to playing the prostitute Angellica Bianca in repertoire performances of *The Rover Part 1*. As a proud and independent courtesan brought to despair, Angellica is the kind of complex role in which the multi-faceted and charismatic Barry excelled. In the hands of Barry, the suffering of Aphra Behn's Angellica Bianca was fully realized on stage before the Post-restoration, bourgeois audience. A female in public without family ties quickly reduces to an unsympathetic thing—a prostitute. As a prostitute and the most serious character in the play, Angellica Bianca stands out. Bianca is Behn's personification of an allowed female aberration,

wealthy through her own endeavors and independent of a particular patriarch, yet in prostitution she serves all men. Prescribed, constructed, and denounced by patriarchy, Angellica maintains her dignity precariously through the delusions of pride and material wealth. The irony of Angellica is that, without familial status and the scrutiny of a male protector, even though she has some independence and freedom, she is alone and must protect herself. As noted by Hughes, *The Rover* shows that in patriarchy women are defined by their relationships “to a particular man, as sister, daughter, or wife. The exception is the category of whore, and that is what a woman becomes in a man’s eyes when the terms of sister, daughter and wife are erased” (2001, 86). The situation of Angellica Bianca’s parallels not only Behn’s life but Barry’s as well. In the harsh environment of the libertine carnival, Angellica is too easy a conquest; unprotected, as a woman, she is eventually destroyed by her own love. In real life, Behn is also thought to have met a difficult end, living out her old age unmarried and in poverty. Barry, on the other hand, although she never married, prospered financially and professionally throughout her unconventional life.

Barry continued to act in both tragic and comic roles until her retirement in 1710. Starting in 1688, Barry was often teamed up with Anne Bracegirdle; they acted together in 56 plays over two decades: thirty of which were tragedies and the balance were comedies (Howe 190-191). Barry and Bracegirdle were a study in contrast on stage. Barry’s image was of strength against adversity, while Bracegirdle’s was genteel refinement; these personal images were often echoed in their roles. Congreve, for example, cast Bracegirdle and Barry as opposite female types in *Way of the World*. (I

discuss an example of the Barry/Bracegirdle pairing in Pix's *The Beau Defeated* in my next section on Anne Bracegirdle.) Howe notes that, although they were often cast as rivals, with Barry as the passionate mistress and Bracegirdle as the pure heroine, in real life, they were "always good friends" and neither actress was threatened or covetous of the other's success (156). In addition to being friends, Barry and Bracegirdle were supportive peers together at the top of a new public female profession, and for that they are symbolic of an important group of vocal female "others" of their period, women who embraced an available venue for performance and public success.

The career of Elizabeth Barry epitomizes the success story of the professional actress of the Restoration—starting from meager beginnings, against all odds, jumping into the burgeoning and frenzied world of capitalism, without the protection of husband or family, doing the job she loved, and earning top wages. In many ways, Barry was ahead of her time, a new breed of modern woman who used her talents, skills, and intellect for professional pursuits and commercial success. Like Nell Gwyn, Elizabeth Barry inspired and created provocative and memorable female characters whose existence challenged simplistic female stereotypes by arousing public interest in what a woman could actually do or how she might truly feel. Barry's theatrical range, however, offered playwrights and audiences more of a spectrum of female personalities than Gwyn's did. Describing Barry as "outstandingly versatile" in her acting, Howe notes that no other actress of her era played near the variety of character types that Barry portrayed, which included comic ingénues, adulterous wives, female libertines, prostitutes and fallen women, mothers, and, her specialty, the tragic heroine (81). In addition to her

innovatively emotional acting style, the character types that Barry created over the four decades of her acting career were another rhetorical mark she left on her culture.

The contributions of Elizabeth Barry to the world of theater have been well-captured by Howe's insightful and detailed feminist theatrical history of Barry's work. A similarly detailed treatment focused on Barry's rhetorical techniques and impact is needed but would require further thorough investigation of letters, articles, reviews and first-hand observations about Elizabeth Barry by her friends and colleagues, as well as a more detailed piecing together scattered accounts of her many performances. One place to look for a female perspective on Barry would be in the writings of her friend and theatrical colleague, Aphra Behn, who alludes to Barry in the poem "Our Cabal." Barry was also friends with Anne Bracegirdle, Nell Gwyn, and Mary Saunderson Betterton, and most assuredly with other actresses of her period. These women worked and socialized together. As professionals in their fields, they most likely discussed and, at least, informally theorized their delivery methods in conversations with each other. Archival research is needed to seek out any possible trace of their ideas.

Anne Bracegirdle

Around 1688, theater's new, young, heroine, Ann Bracegirdle (1663? – 1748), began charming audiences and admirers with her chaste persona of beauty and refinement. Little is known about Bracegirdle's early life, but, according to early eighteenth century publisher Edmund Curll, she was raised from infancy by the famous acting couple, Thomas and Mary Betterton (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:271).

Bracegirdle's upbringing by Mary Betterton, a renowned actress who was also known as a woman of virtue, is significant in that Betterton likely served as Bracegirdle's acting teacher, mentor, and role model. From Mary Betterton, Bracegirdle most probably received instruction in elocution and proper moral conduct, as well as a connection for entering into the acting profession at a young age.²⁸ The *Biographical Dictionary* notes that Bracegirdle could have played several unnamed parts as a girl child, but the evidence is not strong enough to be sure; however, solid evidence in theater records show that Bracegirdle was a paid member of the United Company in 1688 and acted several roles in 1688 and 1689, including a breeches role in Behn's *The Widow Ranter*; and, by the 1690s, Bracegirdle was in high demand for acting "pathetic roles in tragedies and sophisticated heroines in comedies" as well as for speaking prologues and epilogues (Highfill, Burnim and Langhans 2:271). Supremely popular by all accounts, Bracegirdle exuded a moral, yet provocative, image of the female, which she often parlayed into stage roles of aristocratic and virtuous heroines, particularly in comedy.

Bracegirdle was among the virtuous few. When the morality of the players became a growing concern in the eighteenth century, defenders of the stage often cited her as an example of a woman's ability to succeed in the acting profession without compromising her moral upbringing. Colley Cibber mentioned Bracegirdle, along with several other actors, as exemplary in talent and moral responsibility, which should qualify

²⁸ This biographical detail of Bracegirdle's training by Betterton is an example of Lindal Buchanon's recent designation of the topoi of rhetorical education for analyzing a regenerated canon of delivery. It also further supports the idea that acting was a craft or trade that required rhetorical training and offered opportunities in public speaking/performance for women.

them, he felt, not only as respectable but as fit to enter the highest and most genteel echelons of society (52). On Bracegirdle particularly, Cibber writes:

never was any Woman is such general Favour of her spectators, which... she maintain'd, by not being unguarded in her private Character...And tho' she might be said to have been the Universal Passion, and under the highest Temptations; her Constancy in resisting them, serv'd but to increase the number of her Admirers (101)

As Cibber describes, Bracegirdle's offstage behavior was impeccably respectable. Of course, Cibber might well be biased as he was a personal friend of Bracegirdle's from the beginning of her career until their old age. But he is correct in pointing out that Bracegirdle's chaste persona had the impact of making her an object of male lust. As Cibber states, in the early 1690s "it was even a Fashion among the Gay, and Young, to have a Taste or Tendre for Mrs. Bracegirdle." (101). An interesting twist on the theater as rhetorical situation, the mass infatuation of young beaux and gallants for Anne Bracegirdle may be one of the earliest examples of fandom gone awry in popular culture.

As the following anecdote shows, Bracegirdle's appeal offers an early example of how the lives of famous entertainers become intertwined in and controlled by spectator reception. Bracegirdle's persona as a chaste and beautiful virgin and her portrayal of refined female characters who were often in sexual danger, even ravished and raped, had scary real-life repercussions. In December of 1692, the fashion for being enamored with Bracegirdle led to unfortunate consequences when two young men, Captain Richard Hill

and Lord Mohun, made a botched attempt to abduct her, tried to apologize, then stabbed and murdered actor William Mountfort whom they believed to be Bracegirdle's lover (although their suspicion is not supported by any known evidence). These events scared Bracegirdle tremendously and temporarily soured her popularity with the public, as shown by her absence from the stage for a month followed by a decline in box office receipts for the first few months of 1693 (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:272-273). This frightening tale shows an early example of how actresses as performative female bodies perpetuate powerful emotional rhetoric in the public sphere and how spectator reactions, once prompted, are beyond the actresses' control. The persona created by Bracegirdle's image and her public performance aroused both the pathos of male sexual desire and of the male need to protect the female.

Bracegirdle overcame this early scandal of her career quickly. Ironically, the role that redeemed her status and reputation was of a heroine who "emerges victorious after a series of abduction attempts" in *The Richmond Heiress* (1693), a role that required her to perform as "perhaps the first singing actress of her period" (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:272-273). Once again, Bracegirdle persuaded the public that she was still pure despite the recent scandal surrounding her. With her sweet voice and acting talent, Bracegirdle endeared herself to the public. She broke new ground by being the first leading lady on the English stage to add singing, an auditory skill with strong pathetic appeal, to her rhetorical delivery. One of the lines she sang in *The Richmond Heiress*—"I am a maid, I'm still of Vestas train"—announces her continued purity (Highfill, Burnim,

and Langhans 2:272-273). Through singing and the consistency of her persona, Bracegirdle rebuilt her ethos with the public.

By the mid 1690s, Bracegirdle was one of the top actresses in London. Her popularity with audiences is apparent in her speaking epilogues and prologues for at least 20 plays that decade (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:271). In 1695, she joined Thomas Betterton and Elizabeth Barry in forming their own theater company in which she acted some of her most famous roles, many of them written especially for her by William Congreve, including Angelica in *Love for Love* (1695), Almeria in *The Mourning Bride* (1697), and Millamant in *Way of the World* (1700). Howe implies that, similar to Otway's relationship to Elizabeth Barry, Congreve was inspired by unrequited love for Bracegirdle to create a new type of witty heroine: "the irresistible heiress who is pursued by admirers" and who was most often "passive; her task is to protect her reputation and discern if her lover is worthy of her, not to initiate action" (Howe 88). The Bracegirdle heroine had universal appeal because she was something of a rhetorical compromise. She was acceptable to men, to women, to aristocrats, and to the rising bourgeois public. Howe states that, among the actors and actresses of her day, Bracegirdle "seems to have been the greatest favourite with spectators" (98). By virtue of her popularity with audiences, Bracegirdle's persona influenced the content of plays, epilogues, and prologues, not only by Congreve, but also Dryden, Motteux, Dufey, Manley, Rowe, Pix and others. Howe states that "the mass of examples shows that every dramatist, more or less, had the public's view of Bracegirdle in mind when he or she produced roles for her" (100-101). And, it was not only playwrights who were inspired

by the Bracegirdle persona. As Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans describe, Bracegirdle was celebrated, and sometimes roasted, in dozens of poems, letters, scribblings, and songs; she had an entourage of suitors and admirers, from playwrights, such as Congreve and Nicholas Rowe, to noblemen, such as the Earl of Scarsdale and Lord Lovelace, but she was never proven to be romantically involved with any man (276-279). In her life, then, Bracegirdle was very much like the characters she played, the unattainable, cultured coquette of her period.

Bracegirdle's persona and her talent as an actress is well-represented in her most famous role, the coquette Millamant in *Way of the World*. Cibber states of Bracegirdle's portrayal of Millamant "all the Faults, Follies, and Affectations of that agreeable Tyrant, were venially melted down into so many Charms, and Attractions of conscious Beauty" (102). Millamant's mode is one of constant witty repartee, affectation, and raillery. True to comedy of manners form, Millamant is a highly stylized and exaggerated rather than a realistic character, but what makes the role so interesting is its ring of truth in relation to upper class females of the day. As Pat Gill notes, "Unlike most Restoration heroines, but...presumably like most Restoration women, Millamant worries about life after marriage" (167). One of Millamant's chief concerns, illustrated in the famous proviso scene in which she and her lover, Mirabell, set terms for their relationship, is that she is able to maintain some of her own private space as well as her mystery as a female love interest even after marriage. Gill points out that Millamant's seemingly small worries are legitimate concerns for any woman about to enter marriage (168). Millamant, underneath all her exaggerated behavior, is an intelligent heroine who gets what she wants in the end.

By contrast, Millamant's rival, the conniving Mrs. Marwood, played by Elizabeth Barry, is foiled and rejected at the play's end.

Another example of the Barry/Bracegirdle pairing is Mary Pix's *The Beau Defeated*, which is also an example of a woman playwright collaborating with actresses to form the double female speaker. Pix's work is markedly female in its ensemble depiction women of a variety of ages, classes, and social standing as individuals with unique goals and aspirations. Through the serious plot of the intelligent widow, Lady Landsworth (played by Bracegirdle), and the comic plot of the pretentious widow, Mrs. Rich (played by Barry), Pix explores the psychology of female desire as a simultaneous yearning for power, independence, and the ideal man. In this quest, Pix imbues her female characters with Whiggish values that reject the status quo of Tory patriarchy from a uniquely feminist perspective. Structurally, the play contrasts the action surrounding the widow Rich with those surrounding Lady Landsworth, who is also a widow. Mrs. Rich is a ridiculous comic character who aims to ignore the sensible advice of her relatives and enjoy the freedoms of widowhood but who is foiled by her own foolishness, while Lady Landsworth is an attractive widow empowered by intelligence and the desire to choose her own man and pursue him. London's sweetheart Bracegirdle as the assertive Lady Landsworth was cast somewhat against her type. But Bracegirdle's attribute of refinement was key to the role. Lady Landsworth's pursuit of the virtuous Clerimont, even as she maintains an air of decorum, is one of the major plot actions of *The Beau Defeated*. Lady Landsworth says of her design that she will "invert the order of nature and pursue, though he flies" (815). She outlines the ideal man as "genteel, yet

not a beau; witty, yet no debauchee; susceptible of love, yet abhorring lewd women; learned, poetical, musical...modest, generous...and ... mightily in love with me” (815). This line is a prime example of the double-female speaker; Pix, as a woman writer, clearly had a strong image of what many women wanted (and still want today).

Lady Landsworth’s approach to marriage turns the patriarchal table and makes a commodity of men. She uses the language of mercantilism to go shopping for a man when she states “being once condemned to matrimony without ever asking my consent, I now have the freedom to make my own choice and the whole world the mart” (Pix 815). With Pix’s reversal of the commodity metaphor, Lady Landsworth becomes a female symbol of the property owner who can partake directly in the marketplace of male product. And partake she does. By contrast to Lady Landsworth’s conquest, the second widow of the story, the foolish Mrs. Rich, is duped into a disadvantageous second marriage. Played against type by Elizabeth Barry, Mrs. Rich is a silly and obtuse woman. She is, however, a very funny character, and Barry would have had the skill to portray her as simultaneously ridiculous and sympathetic. An example of Mrs. Rich’s comic arrogance can be seen when her brother-in-law tries to give her advice, and she states:

I pretend to live as I please and will have none of your counsel. I laugh at you and all your reproofs. I am a widow and depend on nobody but myself. You come here and control me, as if you had an absolute authority over me. Oh my stars! What rudeness are you guilty of? (824)

The Widow Rich may not use her freedom wisely, but one can imagine that Elizabeth Barry had the presence to deliver this speech in such a way that its meaning transcended the superficiality of the character and touched the hearts of the women in the audience.

Although Barry and Bracegirdle were often cast as opposites or rivals on stage, behind the scenes, Barry and Bracegirdle were not only friends but financially successful business partners. By 1705, Bracegirdle's salary was equal to Barry's as well as the top paid male actors, including Thomas Betterton ((Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:274). Bracegirdle retired early, in 1707, while still in her prime, at the age of forty-four years. A variety of accounts exist as to the detail of events that led up to Bracegirdle's retirement, but it is generally agreed that the competition from Anne Oldfield had much to do with it. More details on this rivalry are described in the subsection on Anne Oldfield in this chapter.

Susannah Percival Mountfort Verbruggen

Susannah of the long name was born, probably in 1667, and raised in a theatrical family. Her father was a minor actor in the Duke's company.²⁹ She played her first minor role in the company in 1681 at the age of 14 and her first starring role as "the robust Nell" in *The Devil of a Wife* in 1686 (Howe 82). Susannah Percival was first married to leading Restoration actor William Mountfort at St. Giles in the Fields in 1686; parish records show that she "declared herself a spinster 19 years old, marrying with the

²⁹ The *Biographical Dictionary* lists Susannah Percival Mounfort Verbruggen as having lived from 1667-1703.

consent of her parents (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 15:137). (Given her future penchant for humor, her description of herself as a “spinster” seems as if it might have been somewhat in jest.) According to the *Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses...in London: 1660-1800*, the couple had at least four children, but sadly, two died in infancy; the fourth child was born in April 1693 following William Mountfort’s murder in December of 1692 (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 15:137).³⁰ Remarkably, the widowed Susannah Mountfort is listed in *The London Stage* as playing at least three roles between February and April of 1693 when she would have been in the last trimester of her pregnancy. As Highfill, Burnim and Langhans note, the dating of these performances seems questionable, but possible, as Restoration and eighteenth century actresses often continued performing late in their pregnancies³¹ (15:137). The actress remarried in 1694, this time to actor John Verbruggen. Over the period from 1694 until her death in 1703, Susannah Mountfort Verbruggen gave her most popular and finest performances. Howe’s research from *The London Stage* shows that the actress played a total of 61 named parts over the period from 1681 to 1703 (187-188).

Over the course of her career, Susannah Mountfort Verbruggen became famous for her skill in creating visual comedy and for portraying a wide variety of roles, from

³⁰ After Mountfort’s murderer, Captain Richard Hill, a crazed male fan of Anne Bracegirdle’s, was acquitted, Mrs. Mountfort apparently appealed the verdict but then decided to drop her appeal in exchange for her father’s release from a death sentence (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 15:137). Further details of the murder are available under the entries for Susannah Verbruggen, William Mountfort, and Anne Bracegirdle in Highfill, Burnim, and Langhan’s *Biographical Dictionary*.

³¹ The audience’s acceptance of visibly pregnant actresses on stage in the Restoration and Post-restoration periods is quite interesting and much more open-minded than the attitudes of prohibiting pregnant women as public speakers in the nineteenth century as described by Lindal Buchanan.

witty heroines, to coquettes, to less-than-glamorous character roles. Cibber states that, like Elizabeth Barry, Mountfort Verbruggen had the talent to breathe life into dull roles and make them interesting through the nuances of her delivery; he states “Nothing, tho’ ever so barren...could be flat in her Hands. She gave many heightened Touches to Characters but coldly written, and often made an Author vain of his Work, that in it self had but little merit” (98). But, unlike Barry, Mountfort Verbruggen was known principally as a comedienne and never excelled in the genre of tragedy. In comedy, however, her range was wide and she was gloriously funny. By the late 1680s, Mountfort Verbruggen was the leading comedienne of the United Company and renowned for both “witty breeches roles and grotesque characters” (Howe 82). She also excelled in playing coquettes. The persuasive appeal of Mountfort Verbruggen’s comedy relied heavily on the physicality of her delivery, skills for which playwrights could create roles but which, for the greater part, were of her own invention. Physical comedy fell well outside acceptable female behavior of the times, and, thus, Verbruggen’s onstage performances embodies subversion of what Judith Butler denotes as the performance of gender. A thorough revisioning of female rhetoric of the Restoration stage must include Verbruggen’s techniques of visual delivery as well as their effects upon the audience.

A number of contemporary remarks on Mountfort Verbruggen’s performances, although they exist only as tidbits preserved in theater history, pieced together help paint a picture of her comedy. Cibber particularly lavished the highest praise on Mountfort Verbruggen’s comic talents, calling her “Mistress of more variety of Humour than I ever knew in any one Woman Actress” (98). Mountfort Verbruggen clearly was not adverse

to playing unglamorous parts. According to Cibber, “She was so fond of Humour, in what low Part soever to be found, that she would make no scruple of defacing her fair Form, to come heartily into it.”(99). Cibber describes how, in the title role of D’urfrey’s forgotten *The Western Lass*³², “Mrs. Montfort transform’d her whole Being, Body, Shape, Voice, Language, Look and Features, into almost another Animal; with a strong Devonshire Dialect, a broad laughing Voice, a poking Head, round Shoulders, an unconceiving Eye, and the most be-diz’ning, dowdy Dress, that ever covered the untrain’d Limbs of Joan Trot³³” (98). Cibber describes another of Mountfort Verbruggen’s character roles—Mary the Buxom in D’Urfey’s *History of Don Quixote*—as “a young tadpole dowdy, as freckled as a raven’s egg, with matted hair, snotty nose, and a pair of hands as black as the skin of a tortoise, with nails as long as kite’s talons upon every finger”; Styan also notes that the role of Mary the Buxom “was vulgar enough to call down the wrath of Jeremy Collier (quoted in Styan 127). Cibber’s reports of Mountfort Verbruggen’s performances were extremely favorable. Actor Tony Aston, however, noted that Verbruggen’s mannerisms were uniform across roles and that her “greatest and usual Position was Laughing, Flirting her Fan...with a kind of affected Twitter” (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 15:139). Aston offers a mix of genuine praise and mild criticism of Mountfort Verbruggen, describing her as “fine, fair..., plump, full featured; her Face of a fine smooth Oval, full of beautiful, well-dispos’d Moles on it, and

³² *The Western Lass* is also known as *The Bath* (1701), which is how it appears in the “Major Actresses and their Roles in New Plays” appendix of Elizabeth Howe’s *The First English Actresses*.

³³ According to Evans’ editorial note in Cibber’s *Apology*, a Joan Trot is a “a female John Trot, i.e., a bumpkin; cf. Trot, John in OED (98).

her Neck and Breast” but also with “thick legs and thighs, corpulent and large posteriors” (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 15:139). Assumedly, the anatomy of male actors of the period was not so closely scrutinized. But, it seems that Mountfort Verbruggen was not averse to the attention and played her parts with aplomb.

Amazing as she was in grotesque character parts, Mountfort Verbruggen is best remembered as the attractive coquette, Melantha, in Cibber’s 1707 *The Comical Lovers; or Marriage A-la-Mode*, a revision of Dryden’s *Marriage a la Mode* (1672).³⁴ Gildon states that, like Bracegirdle as Millamant in *Way of the World*, Verbruggen’s portrayal of Melantha made her character’s ridiculous affectations appear quite natural, thus keeping the comedy believable (53). Although he may have been biased, Cibber indicates that the coquette Melantha was Verbruggen’s finest role, which she played “as finish’d an Impertinent, as ever flutter’d in a Drawing-Room;” Cibber goes on to describe Melantha’s “compleat System of Female Foppery” in which she uses “Language, Dress, Motion, Manners, Soul, and Body...in a continual Hurry to be something more, than is necessary or commendable” (99). Ever effusive, Cibber reserves some of his most vivid descriptions for the visual performances of Susannah Mountfort Verbruggen. Styan calls Cibber’s description of Susannah Mountfort as Melantha “The most famous description of all stage curtsies” in theater history (123). Cibber’s delightful first-hand memory of her performance, although lengthy, gives such detail of Mountfort Verbruggen’s physical delivery that it bears repeating at length here:

³⁴ The role of Melantha was originally played by Elizabeth Boutell in 1672 and became a highly coveted comic part.

... The first ridiculous Airs that break from her [Melantha], are, upon a Gallant, never seen before, who delivers her a Letter from her Father, recommending him to her good Graces, as an honourable Lover. Here now, one would think she might naturally shew a little of the Sexe's decent Reserve...! No, Sir; not a Tittle of it; ...she reads the letter... with a careless, dropping Lip, and an erected Brow, humming it hastily over, as if she were impatient to outgo her Father's Commands... and, that the Letter might not embarrass her Attack, crack! she crumbles it at once, into her Palm, and pores upon him her whole Artillery of Airs, Eyes, and Motion; down goes her dainty, diving Body, to the Ground, as if she were sinking under the conscious Load of her own Attractions; then launches into a Flood of Fine Language, and Compliment, still playhing her Chest forward in fifty Falls and Risings, like a Swan upon waving Water; and, to complete her Impertinence, she is so rapidly fond of her own Wit, that she will not give her Lover leave to praise it: Silent assenting Bows, and vain Endeavors to speak, are all the share of the Conversation he is admitted to, which, at last, he is relive'd from, by her Engagement to half a Score Visits, which she swims from him to make, with a Promise to return in a Twinkling (99-100).

Cibber's description captures the physicality of Verbruggen's curtsy in minute detail and provides an excellent example of how an actress (or actor) creates a rhetorical site where plot, dialog, character, and mannerism come alive in performance. The full impact of

Melantha is not found by simply reading Dryden's script. Each performer insinuates her own personality into a role; Mountfort Verbruggen's interpretation of Melantha defined the character for the Post-restoration audience in 1707.

Theatrical records show that Mountfort Verbruggen also excelled in playing assertive comic female parts in which the characters often appeared in breeches, and she was extremely popular in cross-dressed roles playing a man. In contrast to Bracegirdle, Mountfort Verbruggen specialized in females as the "pursuers rather than the pursued" (Howe 88). These traits made her the perfect actress to play the lead in Thomas Southerne's *Sir Anthony Love* (1690). As Southerne states explicitly in his dedication, he wrote the play *Sir Anthony Love* specifically for Mountfort Verbruggen:

I made every Line for her, she has mended every Word for me; and by a Gaity and Air, particular to her Acting, turn'd every thing into the Genius of the Character (quoted in Weber 163).

As he did for Elizabeth Barry in *The Fatal Marriage*, Thomas Southerne in *Sir Anthony Love* once again created a play designed specifically for the skills of a leading actress—this time for Susannah Mountfort Verbruggen. Although the premise of the play was highly risqué, the action was light and frolicking. Gerard Langbaine calls *Sir Anthony Love* "that diverting comedy" that "met with extraordinary success" (135-136). Once again, the collaboration between playwright and actress made for a popular and commercially successful run.

The combination of Mountfort's acting and Southerne's script took the breeches device to new psychological depths to produce the wild and cunning character of Sir Anthony, a fascinating role that attempts to capture the exhilaration of the libertine experience as portrayed by a cross-dressed female heroine. Turning the tables and taking the power, Mountfort Verbruggen's Sir Anthony supremely exaggerated and satirized the rake-hero as a libertine mastermind plotting the sexual destinies of all the other characters in the play. The style in which Southerne draws Sir Anthony is unique. From the outset, the audience is told the character of Sir Anthony is a woman, but his extremely masculine attitude and behavior continue to fool not only the other characters but also the knowing audience and even Sir Anthony himself. As the character of the Abbe states to Sir Anthony, "thou art everything with everybody, a man among the women, and a woman among the men" (Southerne 1229). The experience proves to be empowering for, Sir Anthony Love (otherwise known as Lucia or Mrs. Lucy). Howe notes that "Southerne's lively heroine...proves that a woman can do everything a man can do in society and do it better" (83). Weber states that Sir Anthony "so enjoys the freedom which her male attire provides that her disguise has come to dominate her personality" (166). Empowered with insight into both the male and the female realm, Mountfort Verbruggen as Lucia disguised as Sir Anthony thoroughly subverted not only the identity of the libertine but also the prescribed personality of the early eighteenth century female.

Sir Anthony is one of the most innovative female roles of the Restoration period, and Mountfort in the character is the soul of the play. She swaggers, jokes, and carouses with men, chases and spurns women, hoodwinks con artists, and generally fools

everybody all of the time. In the opening scene of the play, Sir Anthony calls himself “the arrantest rakehell of them all” and states that he is “as famous for my action with the men, as for my passion with the women” (Southerne 1216). He goes on to describe his proficiency at sword-fighting, and other male characters testify that Sir Anthony has, in fact, stabbed a man recently. While these are normal activities for any rake, Sir Anthony is not just any rake—he is a she in disguise. Adding to the irony, over the course of the play, the audience learns that Sir Anthony’s reason for the cross-dressing masquerade is to win the highest male-to-male admiration of Valentine, a male rake and fellow libertine, after which Sir Anthony will reveal his true identity as a woman. Meanwhile, the comic events allow Southerne and Mountfort to satirize the social situations that exist between males and females. On seducing women, Sir Anthony says “when I can’t convince ‘em I conform” to whatever the female’s political or religious views might be (Southerne 1220). This statement by Sir Anthony, a woman cross-dressed as a man, hints that females must also give the appearances of conforming to patriarchy and hide their own opinions.

In contrast to the freedom of Sir Anthony, the three other women characters, the sisters Floriante and Charlott, and Volare their cousin, are enslaved in the snares of the prescribed patriarchy, with Floriante ear-marked by her father for a forced marriage to a man she despises. Sir Anthony stands up for the women by delivering a critique on the results of forced marriage, which he/she states “‘tis according to law: cuckoldum is the liberty, and a separate maintenance the property, of the freeborn women of England” (Southern 1231). Rather than offering a serious solution to the problem of forced

marriage, Sir Anthony weighs in with comic solution of cuckoldum and separate lives for unhappy spouses. In some ways, all of the women, including Sir Anthony, are fighting to escape from patriarchal prescriptions, but Sir Anthony has developed an if-you-can't-beat'em-join'em attitude. Ironically, Sir Anthony becomes a true rake who competes with the males for the attention of the females and wins out based on his cavalier charms, but then in libertine form declares his sexual victory as he rejects the emotional needs of the women. At the conclusion of play, Southerne subverts the traditional ending of the breeches comedy. As Weber states, one constant of comedies containing a breeches role is the ending in which the cross-dressed woman “ends the charade by revealing her true identity, reaffirming her true sexual nature by giving herself in marriage” (164). As critics have noted previously, Sir Anthony unmasked as Lucia does not choose marriage, the inevitable destination, instead she decides to remain as Valentine's mistress, which she believes will better keep the romantic spark alive and let her retain her freedom (Howe 60; Weber 169). The unconventional ending in *Sir Anthony Love* subverts the comic form by not forcing the arrant female into marriage.

As a living example of woman as mutable, humorous, and unfettered by society's mandatory demand for female beauty, Susannah Percival Mountfort Verbruggen added further depth to the image of the female on stage. Theater was, perhaps, the only venue of that time that allowed for a light-hearted, humorous, rhetorical performance by females, a fact that has been largely ignored in rhetorical history. Even today, humor in general is a largely overlooked persuasive device in historical rhetoric. Yet, Aristotle and Cicero in the classical period, as well as Campbell and Blair in the late eighteenth

century, all wrote about the persuasive appeal of wit and humor. Although the physicality and context-sensitivity of humor make its rhetoric difficult to describe and understand, Verbruggen and the other female comediennes of her day occupied a unique rhetorical space that deserves even closer scrutiny than I have given here.

Anne Oldfield

Following most closely in the footsteps of Barry and Bracegirdle, Anne Oldfield (1683-1730) was another actress of the early eighteenth century who achieved immense popularity with audiences and considerable notoriety, both in her craft and her public persona. Oldfield came up through the ranks of junior actresses, eventually eclipsing her rivals, to become the stage's leading comic heroine from about 1706 until the mid 1720s. She also succeeded in tragic roles toward the end of her career. As noted by biographer Joanne Lafler, Oldfield "appeared in over one hundred roles, of which nearly seventy were original" (3). As with many of the other actresses in this study, Colley Cibber is one of the best primary sources on Oldfield's persona and delivery skills. Lafler states of Cibber, "he plainly adored Mrs. Oldfield, as well he might, for she performed brilliantly in many of his own plays and acted with him in countless others. ...[H]e left a picture of her common sense, good humor, and artistic dedication that may be a shade too perfect but offers a pleasant contrast to the barbs that were sometimes hurled at her by unhappy rivals" (x). Oldfield was beautiful and refined, yet had the offstage reputation of being a diva, as well as the usual actress' image of sexually promiscuous mistress to powerful men.

Oldfield's style was grand. She was at her best playing witty heroines, especially those who were genteel and aristocratic. Like Bracegirdle, Oldfield is interesting as a cross-over figure that embodied qualities to satisfy both Restoration and early-eighteenth century tastes. Oldfield's persona appears to have combined a variety of attributes from the Restoration actresses before her: a sophisticated comic heroine, highly popular with audiences, and scrutinized by the public for her non-traditional personal life. She also possessed some female attributes that were popular with the Whig segment of the population. As Richard Steele noted in *The Spectator*, Oldfield was genteel yet had "the greatest simplicity of manner of any of her age"; he stated further that "everyone that sees her knows her to be of quality... Her beauty is full of attraction, but not of allurements," and that she maintained "composure in her looks, and propriety in her dress" (quoted in Lewis 23). Steele's description brings to mind a woman of sensibility.

Oldfield's image of refinement and dignity was related to her delivery techniques as well, including her expressions, gestures, movement, and voice. Cibber compares her bearing and demeanor to the "principal Figure in the finest Painting" and describes her voice as "sweet, strong, piercing, and melodious," her pronunciation "voluble, distinct, and musical," and the emphasis in her speech always on the points that were most pertinent in the dialog (349). From Cibber's reports, it appears that Oldfield was a master of vocal delivery and intonation. He also comments on her expressions, especially the ability of her eyes to communicate meaning to and connect emotionally with her audience (349). Although Cibber's comments may have been biased by his lifelong friendship with Oldfield, commentary on Oldfield by other writers of the period indicate

that there was truth in the praise. A young writer, Tom Davies, described Oldfield's expressive acting and her "trick of half-shutting her eyes 'when she intended to give effect to some brilliant or gay thought'"(Lafler 3). Early twentieth century theater historian Benjamin Lewis³⁵ also captured several comments from Oldfield's contemporaries, such as Bellchamber's report of Oldfield's "large speaking eyes, which, in some particular comic situations, were kept half shut, especially when she intended to realize some brilliant idea" (23). The wording of these observations given by Lafler and Lewis, attributed to two different sources, seems suspiciously similar, but, if we take these observations of Oldfield as true, the impression is that Oldfield's eyes were a key component of her expression and her dramatic delivery.

When Oldfield began her acting, before she became the refined actress of great composure, like Barry, she appeared not to have had an ear for delivery. As noted by Lewis, shortly after Oldfield took to the stage in 1699, her talents were dismissed by both Colley Cibber and Charles Gildon (14-15). Until 1703, Oldfield acted only bit parts. Cibber observed that, during her first year in the theater, Oldfield's delivery, particularly her speech, was below par (94-95). Cibber relates how his opinion of Oldfield as an actress was transformed quite suddenly when, in the absence of Mrs. Verbruggen (due to pregnancy) during the summer season at Bath, Oldfield was cast opposite Cibber in *Sir*

³⁵ As I have noted earlier in this dissertation, the annals of theater history are filled with fascinating commentary, but it is difficult to determine fact from fiction. Lewis offers some interesting facts and anecdotes on eighteenth century actresses, which are corroborated by other historians; however, his portrait of Oldfield is so glowing and his accompanying comments about Anne Bracegirdle are quite uncharitable in a personal way, particularly since he, like us, did not really know Bracegirdle. Thus, I've only included his materials that seem to be in line with other critical and historical readings.

Courtly Nice. As Cibber tells it, he was so unenthusiastic about acting with Oldfield that he barely deigned to rehearse with her and, in response to his indifference, she “muttered out her words in a sort of miffy manner” during the rehearsal, but when it came time to perform, she amazed him with “so forward and sudden a step into nature” as he had ever seen (Lewis 16). From this point forward, Oldfield blossomed as an actress.

In 1704, Oldfield had her breakout performance and from there she sailed quickly to the top echelon of London actresses where Barry and Bracegirdle reigned. The role that established Oldfield as a leading comedian was the female lead, Lady Betty Modish, in Colley Cibber’s *The Careless Husband*, which the playwright completed specifically with Oldfield in mind (Lewis 17). With this role, she began acting the witty heroine opposite Robert Wilks with whom she developed a famous stage partnership in the tradition of Nell Gwyn and Charles Hart. As Lafler notes, by 1706 Oldfield had acted with Wilks in “five new plays...and four stock pieces [repertoire]” (43). The Oldfield/Wilks team is another example of how the witty couple remained an important rhetorical element in the theater that helped give focus to the issues surrounding real-life, heterosexual, romantic partnerships in English society and provided a model of intellectual equality between genders.

The sexually-charged stage relationship of Oldfield and Wilks is well-represented in their performance of Farquhar’s comedy *The Recruiting Officer*. Lafler states that the comedy provided “ample opportunity for the sexual sparring and double entendre that became the keynote of the Oldfield-Wilks stage relationship”(44). For example, Wilks as Captain Plume states that he and Oldfield’s character, Silvia, “had once agreed to go to

bed together, could we have adjusted preliminaries, but she would have the wedding before the consummation and I was for consummation before the wedding. We could not agree. She was a pert, obstinate fool and would lose her maidenhead her own way so she may keep it" (quoted in Lafler 44). The sexual innuendo and back story of the plot revealed through the dialog implicate the sexual nature of the characters without any explicit sexual action in the play. But even in this first decade of the increasingly moralistic eighteenth century, implications of sexual activity could result in censorship. Lafler points out that one scene of *The Recruiting Officer* was censored and removed from the play after opening night because in it the character of a country girl (who formerly had been impregnated and had a child by Plume) was lamenting her night of love with the disguised and cross-dressed Sylvia who, as a female transvestite character, could not give her "as many fine things as the captain can" (96). Apparently, this level of sexual innuendo was deemed too provocative for the new cultural climate of the eighteenth century. But, even in the increasingly censorious period, playwrights and players were still attempting to push the limits of acceptability. In the first decade of the eighteenth century, the characters of Plume and Sylvia carry on in the Restoration tradition of the gay couple and the libertine couple, as seen in plays from Dryden, Behn, Congreve and many others. The witty female lead was still in demand, and Oldfield fit the bill.

Oldfield's star was rising in popularity, but Barry and Bracegirdle were still the leading actresses. This would all change soon. Barry retired in 1710 when she was somewhere between 52 and 54 years old. Bracegirdle retired even earlier, in 1707,

apparently in response to competition from Oldfield who was twenty years younger. According to the *Biographical Dictionary*, Bracegirdle's popularity was being challenged by Oldfield, but Bracegirdle was still extremely popular (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:275). Oldfield biographer Joanne Lafler, however, indicates that Oldfield's star was rising at the expense of Bracegirdle's popularity (46). Either way, both sources cite an account, most likely written by Edmund Curll and believed to be true, of an acting contest between the two actresses. The details are vague, but a contest was set up in which Bracegirdle was to play the lead in *The Amorous Widow* one night and Oldfield was to play it the next. Apparently Bracegirdle performed the role to the "Admiration" of the audience on the first night, but the next night Oldfield's outstanding performance "charm'd the whole audience to that Degree, they almost forgot they had ever seen Mrs. Bracegirdle" (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 2:275). Bracegirdle, an actress in her forties yet still in her prime, could have continued her career in as variety of roles as Barry was doing, but she did not. Soon after the competition, Bracegirdle retired.

After her competition with Bracegirdle, Oldfield was triumphant and became, according to many accounts, something of a diva. Stories began circulating of Oldfield, "Basking in public approval, ... putting on airs, coming to the theater in a sedan chair while the veteran actresses made do on foot" (Lafler 48). Despite her image of the genteel lady, Oldfield seemed often in the midst of controversy regarding her profession and the business of theater. In her defense, Oldfield, like many business people, was confronted with difficult professional situations. In 1709, for example, actor and theater manager Dogget did not allow Oldfield to participate in the management of a new theater

company specifically because she was a woman. Lafler reports that Oldfield was “[b]arred, as a woman, from participation in profits and managerial decisions,” so she had to “exercise her power in less formal ways”; to Lafler, the “accounts of [Oldfield’s] threatened walkouts and tantrums are more understandable in this context” (66). In another professional controversy, Oldfield had an alleged dispute with Jane Rogers when both actresses vied for the tragic role in Ambrose Philips’ *The Distrest Mother*. According to Lafler, an acting contest was proposed, but Oldfield was supported by Wilks, which caused Rogers to bow out of the contest and write a public letter “to the Town” of her suffering at the abuse of Mrs. Oldfield and Mr. Wilks (Lafler 94). As with earlier scandals involving actresses, this temporary black mark on Oldfield’s professional reputation quickly faded. Throughout her famous career, though, even as she maintained a appearance of refinement, Oldfield had a notorious sexual reputation as mistress to powerful men, most notably Lieutenant General Charles Churchill with whom she had an illegitimate son.

Yet, the trivia of her real-life disputes and liaisons paled compared to Oldfield’s persona and performance on the stage. In 1707, she played perhaps her finest role: Mrs. Sullen in Farquhar’s *The Beaux’ Stratagem*. As Lafler notes, Mrs. Sullen was a desirable woman “trapped in a loveless marriage. In an age in which divorce was virtually impossible”; yet the combined humor of Farquhar’s script and Oldfield’s comedic delivery give a light touch to what “in real life it would be pitiable indeed.”(51-52). Oldfield, as Mrs. Sullen, describes herself in marriage “groaning under a yoke,” in a relationship wrought with “radical hatreds,” bound by the “manacles of law;” she then

poses a rhetorical question to her maid and another woman: “[I]n England, a country whose women are its glory, must women be abused? Where women rule, must women be enslaved?” (Farquhar 1306). In these lines, we hear Oldfield as Mrs. Sullen linking England’s national pride with pathetic appeals regarding the rights of English women. *The Beaux’ Stratagem* was a commercial success, As Lafler notes, running for ten performances upon opening and becoming one of “the most popular pieces in the Drury Lane repertory” with Oldfield continuing to play Mrs. Sullen “at least once every season throughout her career” (54). Thus, the role of Mrs. Sullen might be regarded as Oldfield’s signature in theater.

By the second decade of the eighteenth century, Oldfield also started playing in tragedy, including the title character of Rowe’s *The Tragedy of Lady Jane Gray* (1715). While Oldfield continued to act for another fifteen years, Marsden notes that in 1715 “the conjunction of *Lady Jane Gray* and the Hanoverian succession brings to a close an unusual period in English theater, a time when women rather than men dominated the stage and when the heroine rather than the hero defined tragedy” (35). The domination of female-focused theater, which arose with the actress in 1660 and reached its height in the 1690s and the first decade of the eighteenth century was coming to a close. With the acceptance and assimilation of actresses into the theater world, the advent of Whig politics, and new bourgeois concerns, the female on stage was no longer a novelty. Spectators wanted to see new themes and symbols performed on stage. Suffering females and coquettes would still have a place in theater repertoire, but they would no longer occupy center stage.

A NEW VIRTUE: FEMALE RHETORIC ON THE EARLY GEORGIAN STAGE

Queen Anne, the last of the Stuart monarchs, died in 1714. The year 1715 marks the beginning of the Hanoverian dynasty with the coronation of George Lewis, elector of Hanover, as George I, King of England. Historians generally agree that the Hanoverian succession completed the transition of England, begun by the Glorious Revolution, from an absolute monarchy to a mixed government in which the monarchy functioned as an executive branch sharing power with Parliament, the legislative branch. Parliament, in the hands of Prime Minister Robert Walpole, wielded increasing control over English law and London society. In this political context, the emergent bourgeois ideology, Protestant values, anti-Catholic sentiments, and tensions between Whigs and Tories generated complex texts and subtexts in plays and performances. During the period from 1715 to 1737, Protestant critics continued to reject plays that depicted immorality in women, and Parliament increasingly disapproved of plays that satirized the government. Tension between Parliament and the theater resulted in a vicious circle of satire and censorship ultimately culminated in the Walpole-backed Licensing Act of 1737, which, as Canfield notes, “enforced zero tolerance for criticism of the ministry and effectively disciplined playwrights into conformity” (xvii). At issue was the right of free speech and artistic expression versus suppression of anti-government propaganda and the public’s need for propriety and decorum. This chapter will explore how these civilizing cultural

conditions led to a decline in the theater and the move away from female-focused rhetoric on stage.

Bourgeois Ideology, Politeness, and Shifting Symbolism

Early Georgian society completed the ideological shift from concerns of traditional patriarchy and aristocracy to the concerns of the new bourgeois culture and its citizens. The male citizen with his aspiring commercial mission in life created new male-centered themes for the early Georgian stage. As Canfield states, early Georgian drama “solidified bourgeois ideology” and established a new ethos based on positive depictions of the merchant class (xvii). Plays such as George Lillo’s *The London Merchant* (1731), John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* (1728) and the dramatic works of Henry Fielding took the focus off of the individual suffering female and turned it to the middle-class male hero, conflicts in the citizen class of urban society, and the hypocritical aspects of parliamentary government.

Another cultural factor impacting the decline of female rhetoric on the London stage in the eighteenth-century was the society’s new obsession with decorum and politeness, an attribute that in the long run tended to suppress female speech. In *The Rhetoric of Sensibility*, Paul Goring cites numerous recent studies to support the “concomitant transformation of manners and a growth of ‘politeness’” accompanying the emergence of a bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth century (Goring 20). As Goring writes, “Politeness...allowed members of the middling classes to present a public image of civilised gentility” and “contributed a type of refined cultural cement that

supported sociable relations by bringing people together within the framework of shared social practices” (22). For eighteenth-century women, adherence to proper social practices was what signified refinement. This was a distinct departure from the Restoration era’s concept of gentility endowed by aristocratic birthright. Polite behavior became a public model of citizenship.³⁶ The concept of politeness was not actually rooted in bourgeois ideology but was rather an appropriated custom that served the bourgeois ends of allowing individuals to distinguish themselves on their own behavior rather than through patrilineal pedigree. From this premise, as Goring argues, “the bodies of orators and actors were important to the growth of politeness because they occupied supremely public positions in eighteenth century life, and thus were ripe for dispersing this quality through a broader public” (25). The stage could serve as a vehicle for communicating correct moral conduct, as well as modeling the punishment for improper behavior. Just as Collier’s critique of the stage had prescribed, plays and theatrical roles in the early eighteenth century were increasingly viewed as serving a didactic function.

Politeness was (and still is) a learned cultural behavior. As the current research on eighteenth century culture shows, politeness was also a prerequisite of social success. A comparison might be drawn between politeness in the eighteenth century and home décor today: both are outward trappings, or signs, appropriated by an upwardly mobile middle-class who are aspiring to a lifestyle of greater economic advantage. These outward, physical signs have traditionally had particularly persuasive hold on women

³⁶ Politeness, as a sign of upwardly mobile identity and as a means for individuals to enter into educated and genteel society, was also an attribute of seventeenth-century French salon rhetoric.

because appearance, more so than accomplishment, has remained an important sign of female cultural identity.

Female identity as depicted on stage was also connected to political symbolic. Therefore, the dramatic rhetoric of female identity was affected by the decline of the Tories and ascension of the Whigs to power. Jean Marsden argues that female virtue was adopted as a symbol of decorum by the Whig party to serve as a counterpoint both to the masculine, absolutist monarchial corruption of the Tory party and to Catholicism, which Whigs associated with female perversion as embodied in the unnatural celibacy of nuns and the immoral sexuality of prostitutes who symbolize the fate of females who reject Protestant moral reform (*Fatal Desire* 169-170). Female virtue, as espoused by Whig symbolism, consisted of moral perfection, beauty, chastity, and silence. This complex symbolism of the female gender found voice through Whig playwrights such as Nicholas Rowe and Susannah Centlivre.

Even with the decorousness of Whig sensibility on the rise, the theater business was thriving. By 1720, the theatrical repertoire in London was broad, and Londoners had many theaters from which to choose. As noted by Jessica Munns, theater-goers might attend “the Queen’s Theatre in the Haymarket, The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, a renovated Lincoln’s Inn Fields, two theatres in outer London at Greenwich and Richmond, and two new inner London theatres – the Little Theater in the Haymarket,...as well as one at Goodman’s Fields” (99). However, tensions between the theater business and the government were growing and were not helped by politically satirical works, such as Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* and *Polly*, which was banned from

performance. By the time Henry Fielding attempted to stage the anti-government skit *The Golden Rump*, the last straw that caused Walpole to pass the Licensing Act of 1737, the number of theaters in London was again reduced to two (Munns 99-100). In this hostile climate, theater productions were dramatically decreased, resulting in fewer roles being performed.

While the early eighteenth century saw censorship tightening the reigns on theatrical performance, it also saw increased interest in the practices of oratory. The influence of the Lockean social contract indirectly brought about awareness that society was composed of individual voices. Thus, practice and skill in public speaking became especially important. As Paul Goring notes, over a half dozen shorter publications on elocution and oratory were published from the early to mid eighteenth century (10-11). But, unlike the artistic, mixed-gender fields of stagecraft and novel writing, the civically-situated public practice of oratory made it a masculine activity with females allotted only a passive role as spectators (Goring 10). Eighteenth-century pamphlets, manuals, and lectures on oratory were written for a male-only audience. Unlike Gildon's *The Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton*, which exemplified many practices of delivery in the acting of Barry and Bracegirdle, eighteenth century publications on elocution gave no female examples of delivery. This division between delivery in oratory and delivery in drama partially accounts for the actress' dismissal from elocutionary manuals. What makes this dismissal seem unjust is that elocutionists such as Thomas Sheridan, the prominent elocutionary theorist of the period, frequently drew from practices of dramatic acting as models and examples for effective oratory. The elocutionary movements reaffirmation of

public speaking as a male-only practice was one way that the newly minted actress, although she maintained her professional niche, lost prominence of voice.

By the 1730s, political, economic, and cultural factors led to the decline of drama as an artistic platform and as venue for rhetoric. Montague Summers notes that, by the Hanoverian era of the mid-eighteenth century, the theater was in a period of decline as a popular art form (289). This was due, in part, to a rejection of the confrontational and risqué style of the Restoration period, which the public and critics increasingly saw as licentious or at least as brash. How did the public contribute to this decline? What were the implications for the profession of actress? What were the implications for females as public speakers of rhetoric?

Performing Female Rhetoric in an Age of Decorum

Following two decades in which new productions of sexually provocative plays such as Southerne's *Sir Anthony Love* and Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer* and *The Beaux's Stratagem*, public pressure started by Collier's calls for morality on the stage overtook the anti-platonic and libertine dramatic mode. The general perception of the early Georgian period as a time when the focus of drama shifted from licentious displays to performances of sentimentality and decorum can be tested by looking more closely at the new plays, dominant genres, and the reprisals of Restoration and Post-restoration plays. What exactly were the changes that occurred in theater from the beginning of the century up until the Licensing Act of 1737? As Todd notes, initially the number of theatres grew in the early eighteenth century, but the Licensing Act of 1737 brought all

productions under the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain, resulting in a drop in new productions, a reduction in the number of London theaters back down to two, and a trend by playwrights to revise Shakespearean and Restoration plays into sentimental dramas devoid of bawdy and licentious material (Sensibility 35). According to Arthur Scouten, editor of *The London Stage: Part 3*, “theatrical activity...was checked in 1737 and [supposedly] completely halted in 1747 by the passage of a law designed to limit production of legitimate drama to the two patent houses and place the licensing of plays under the Lord Chamberlain” (xlviii). Yet, theatrical production never ceased, as it had during the Interregnum. Scouten goes on to state that “we may regard the fifteen years between 1737 and 1752 as being a transition period when the Licensing Act might or might not be enforced, or if enforced... at such theaters as the New Haymarket... productions might be relatively safe at smaller theatres, great rooms, or tennis courts (lix-ix). In fact, Todd warns against exaggerating the theatrical decline of the 1720s and 1730s. While the volume of performances declined and the tone of the plays changed, “the plays most performed and watched remained the same, although they were rewritten to suit the demands of the new audience” (Todd Sensibility 35). Many of the most popular plays, such as Farquhar’s sexually suggestive comedy, *The Beau’s Stratagem*, although censored, continued to be performed. New plays performed between 1715 and 1737 consisted of a little bit of everything: tragedy, sentimental and laughing comedy, and even the new genre of the ballad opera, but all in small numbers.

In tragedy, playwrights reach back to old forms and create new ones. Delarivier Manley’s last play, *Lucius, The First Christian King of Britain* (1717) returned to the

early 1660s form of heroic tragedy to give a fictionalized account of the legendary King Lucius' conversion to Christianity. In *Lucius*, Manley offered what Melinda A. Rabb calls "a final Tory fantasy about the virtues of the true royal bloodline and dangers of foreign rule" and, through the invented character of Queen Rosalinda, continues her lifelong theme of "the inseparability of sex and politics" (75). The Queen's part was aptly cast to courtly, yet provocative, Anne Oldfield. Oldfield also played an aristocratic heroine in Rowe's *The Tragedy of Lady Jane Gray*. In an entirely different direction, the new development in of the genre of tragedy was George Lillo's *The London Merchant* (1731), a play that centers on the tragic dilemmas of George Barnwell, a middle-class man. Although the play contrasts two women characters, the sentimental and sweet Lucy with the mercenary femme fatal Millwood, the bourgeois plot centers on the choices and pathetic suffering of middle-class hero, Barnwell.

Bourgeois sensibility was also presented in comedies, from sentimental and laughing comedies, to the light and cheerful ballad opera and the extremely farcical burlesque. The Whiggish laughing comedies of Susannah Centlivre, more so than other comedies of the period, continued to center on female themes. In many of her works, Centlivre addressed the gender-focused themes of courtship and marriage with a new sensibility. In *Bold Stroke for a Wife*, for example, she adopted the female as commodity metaphor of earlier periods and introduced the theme of female silence. Perhaps the greatest innovation of early Georgian drama was John Gay's working class ballad opera, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728). Canfield characterizes the genre of ballad opera as a satirical and artistically escapist reaction to the capitalism inherent in "the new bourgeois

ethos” (xvii). Ostensibly, the most popular and culturally influential character in *The Beggar’s Opera* was Polly Peachum, a working class female played by actress Lavinia Fenton. Her popularity inspired Gay to write a sequel to *The Beggar’s Opera* called *Polly*, which was never performed due the political censorship.

In addition to changing genres, another aspect of drama that changed in the early Georgian period was the standard for performance and delivery. In *The Rhetoric of Sensibility*, Goring delineates two spectrums of delivery: at one extreme is the classical body with its patrician style of declamation while at the other is the modern body with its sentimental and emotional delivery. With the passing of many of the great Restoration actors, such as Thomas Betterton and Elizabeth Barry, their controlled and nuanced emotional style of acting was replaced in the first half of the eighteenth century, Goring suggests, by a “classical mode” of acting which consisted of an overly mannered and grand posturing (123-125). Also, an increasingly middle class audience may have judged the highly stylized facial expression, gestures, movements, and intonations that appeared natural on the Restoration stage as overly exaggerated in the early eighteenth century. Goring blames the departure from naturalism in acting on Gildon’s *Life of Mr. Thomas Betterton*, which he correctly describes as an acting manual that infused classical oratory into acting theory, which, Goring argues, rendered unnatural and stiff delivery techniques

(127).³⁷ Goring's explanation sounds logical, but Gildon's manual alone cannot account for what might be viewed as a decline in the quality of acting.

Revising Actresses of the Early Georgian Period

Eighteenth century tastes were changing from those of the seventeenth century,³⁸ and the change was certainly reflected in the theater audiences' appreciation of styles of acting. New tastes called for new qualities in the actress. Todd notes that, "as plays and audiences grew more decorous, theatrical women came to assume something of the moral and pathetic value they were beginning to hold in the culture as a whole" (Sensibility 37). This association of women and female characters with moral virtue foreshadows not only the later eighteenth century literary trend of sensibility but also the nineteenth century cult of true womanhood. And, while moral virtue is a positive trait, it had some negative repercussions for female both on stage and off in the ideological association of female goodness with silence. Thus, the period from 1715 to 1737 appears to have imposed a quieting down of female voices and female-focused themes on stage. While theater companies maintained a pool of actresses who performed in the theater over the twenty-

³⁷ According to Goring, emotionally-driven delivery in acting was a major theme of *The Prompter*, a periodical written and published in 173 issues from 1734 to 1736 by Aaron Hill, and soon after an improved naturalistic acting was brought to the stage in the 1740s by the great eighteenth century actor David Garrick (125-128). Also, elocutionary theories involving a more passionate and bodily communication of emotion in oratory were espoused in Thomas Sheridan's *Lectures on Elocution* (1763).

³⁸ Later in the eighteenth century, taste becomes a major topic of philosophy and rhetoric. Artistic taste and aesthetics are the focus of David Hume's *On Standards of Taste* (1757) and a major concern of Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783).

two year segment of the earlier Georgian period, the number of prominent actresses seems much fewer than it had been in earlier decades. The following sections will examine the two most influential: Anne Oldfield and Lavinia Fenton.

Oldfield's Later Career

Anne Oldfield's continued success in the Hanoverian is evidence that, even with theater in a temporary decline, the profession of actress was an established rhetorical career path for women—a career path that men could no longer occupy and, for the most part, did not want to take away from them. Although Oldfield stated that she did not care for acting in tragedies, she succeeded in the genre, Lafler notes, in her creation and portrayal of a “new kind of heroine, the stalwart, saintly patriot” (3). Oldfield developed the patriotic heroine through both new roles and her reinterpretation of reprised roles. Incidentally, after Barry's retirement, Oldfield did not immediately attempt to claim Barry's roles, Lafler suggests, because Oldfield was not interested in or suited for playing the emotional and passionate suffering that these roles demanded; rather Oldfield “began to assemble a tragic repertoire that would be distinctively hers, playing to her strengths: a statuesque figure, a commanding stage presence, and a melodious voice” (91). With these traits in mind, it is understandable why Oldfield was cast as the regal, virtuous, and perfectly idealized title character of Rowe's *The Tragedy of Lady Jane Gray* (1715). After playing Lady Jane, Oldfield did pick up some of Barry's previous roles, such as Calista in *The Fair Penitent*. Ultimately Oldfield excelled in tragedy as well as comedy and continued to deliver successful performances in the roles of patriotic and genteel

heroines until shortly before her death in 1730. “At the time of her death,” Lafler states, “Anne Oldfield was known not only to every theatergoer in London but to the larger reading public” for her lavish lifestyle (1). Oldfield was also seen as one of the last of the great early actresses.

Lavinia Fenton

In terms of rhetorical and persuasive influence on the early Georgian period, one other actress who was instrumental was Lavinia Fenton (1708-1760). Although Fenton only had a short, two-year career on the stage, she embodied the spirit of the age in her portrayal of Polly Peachum in Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera*. In the light-hearted but highly satiric ballad opera, Polly is a sentimental character: a common young woman who is ruled by her heart, disobedient to her parents, and loyal to her man. After portraying Polly, Fenton became immediately famous, played a few more roles, then retired from the stage to the private life of mistress to Duke of Bolton whom she married many years later.

According to the *Biographical Dictionary*, the prevailing account from all early biographers was that “Lavinia had a natural talent for singing and speaking, possessed a simple, melodious voice well suited to the English ballad, and that after her success in *The Beggar’s Opera* the fan and print shops exhibited her figure every day” (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 5:222). The teenage actress Fenton as Polly sang and danced her way into the hearts of Londoners who were ready to turn from the heady, intellectual comedies of manners that for so long dominated the theater to the lighter fare of

burlesque, low comedy, and the ballad opera. As a result of Polly's overnight success, the identity of Lavinia Fenton became subsumed by the character Polly, and public interest in her persona demanded as much information as possible about her. Several biographies of Polly/Lavinia were immediately written, but the stories of Lavinia's early life provided by the biographers conflict and are not corroborated to be sufficiently reliable.

The first concrete evidence of Lavinia Fenton's background appears to be of her early acting at the Haymarket Theatre in the spring of 1726, "which won her much applause and the favor of several noblemen"; her successful participation "with a company of young players at Lincoln's Inn Fields," and her employment by theater owner John Rich who started paying her 15s. per week then quickly doubled her salary to retain her as her popularity rose (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 5:221). During the 1726–27 season, Fenton portrayed a variety of comic parts including a Mrs. Squeamish in *The Country Wife*. But it was the 1727–28 season, her last season as an actress, that Fenton made her fame as Polly Peachum. In addition to many performances of Polly that year, Fenton acted in other roles, such as Alinda in *The Pilgrim*, Ophelia in *Hamlet*, and Betty in *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*; she also performed as a singer and dancer between acts of the plays (Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 5:222).

During the same season, apparently, Fenton captured the heart of the already-married third Duke of Bolton. In July 1728, soon after Lavinia had quit the stage, Johnathan Swift wrote that the "Duke of Bolton has run away with Polly Peachum, having settled four hundred per year on her during pleasure, and, upon disagreement, two

hundred more" (quoted in Highfill, Burnim, and Langhans 5:222). The two lived together happily unwedded for 23 years. When the Duchess died in 1751, the Duke married Lavinia Fenton. Although Fenton's life would not be called respectable by the standards of her times, she became the first actress to receive a royal title by marriage. Fenton's importance as a female rhetorical symbol of the early Georgian period lies in the short yet supreme popularity of Polly. Her sentimental stage persona foreshadowed Richardson's *Pamela* and the virtuous girl heroines in the novels of the mid to late eighteenth century. Rhetorically, Polly represents the spirit of the eighteenth century, a prosperous time in which the English middle class were gaining an identity but also a time when satire, as a masculine literary form, vied with the feminized form of sentimentalism. Through the gendering of cultural ideology, political symbols, and literary models, women in the eighteenth century were encouraged to be silent, except for singing, conversation, and private pastimes and entertainment. In contrast to the popularity of female wit and outspokenness of Restoration women, women by the early Georgian period were cast back into the private domestic places where eighteenth-century society thought they belonged.

* * *

So ends the story of the actresses and their rhetorical role on the London stage from their debut in 1660, through the female-focused theater of the Restoration and Post-restoration period, to their assimilation into the cultural landscape by the early Georgian

period. Although the Licensing Act of 1737 reduced theatrical production for several years, the English theater has never lost its taste for talented actress. Even in the quiet period, actresses such as Kittie Clive, Susannah Cibber, Charlotte Charke, and Peg Woffington continued to perform. In the ensuing years, the popularity of David Garrick's theater company brought actress Sarah Siddons to fame, but, with the advent of the new genre of the novel, the theater was no longer the main focus of England's literary activity. By the mid-eighteenth century, actresses held an established and permanent position in London theater, but they had lost their novelty. The common acceptance of actresses on stage lessened their rhetorical impact from what it had been when, for over forty years, they were the obsession of the London public.

DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE AS A RHETORIC OF GENDER

London theater of the Restoration and immediate post-Restoration eras, when read as a mixed-gender rhetorical venue, presents a feminist kairos—an opportunity for rereading and revisioning the actress from object to subject, from passive receiver to active participant and creator of the message. Overall, the attention given to issues of femaleness in Restoration and early eighteenth century plays exceeds that of the drama of preceding and subsequent periods and suggests that the actress served as a motivator for Restoration theater's obsession with gender roles and female freedom. What makes the entire period unique is, as Styan notes, the number and variety of female “delightfully extroverted free spirits” found on the stage (118). This phenomenon of female rhetoric reflects not only the novelty of having the actresses on stage but also the charisma and elocutionary skill of the best female performers of the period. It also marks a rite of passage for non-aristocratic, English women entering into the public sphere as speakers, which is indeed a unique event in the rhetorical history of women.

The novelty of the actresses and the amazing talents they displayed, as well as disillusionment with the male-dominated government and system of patriarchy, were surely the major contributing factors that led to the female focus on stage. These rhetorical contexts are complex and, as Goring notes, historical studies of both drama and oratory are difficult (especially in periods preceding video recording) in that both are “ephemeral practices...now only knowable as mediated through the meta-texts produced

around them” (13). Thus, my project required the combing and culling of a wide variety of sources to create a historiography of the performed female rhetorics of England from 1660 to 1737. Theater history is an old field of study that offers a huge quantity of textual materials for examination. While I needed to consult multiple sources to sift out the significant trends and events, the theater history of 1660 to 1737 is body of material rife with women and female themes, making it a rich source for feminist re-reading.

Adding to the richness of my study, are the fascinating, culturally rich, and distinct rhetorical contributions of the Restoration actresses: Nell Gwyn as the original witty comic heroine and female emblem of anti-platonic rhetoric; Mary Saunderson Betterton as the elocutionary teacher of young actresses; Elizabeth Barry as the greatest mistress of emotion who transcended the stereotype of witty heroine to realize the tragic depths of female suffering; Anne Bracegirdle as London’s eternally chaste sweetheart; Susannah Mounfort Verbruggen who defied conventions of beauty and femininity to deliver a repertoire of comic creatures; Anne Oldfield as the patriotic and composed Englishwoman of the eighteenth century; and Lavinia Fenton as Polly, the working class girl who sang her way into London’s heart. Each of these actresses’ rhetorical careers established a unique rapport with their audiences. Collectively, the actresses started a unique rhetorical tradition that continues even today.

Many great stage roles for women have made strong rhetorical statements since those times. One can imagine Ann Bracegirdle as Nora in Ibsen’s *The Doll’s House*, Elizabeth Barry as Blanche Duboise in Ford’s *A Streetcar Named Desire*, or Susannah Mountfort Verbruggen as Martha in Albee’s *Whose Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* When I

have spoken publicly on the Restoration and early eighteenth century actresses' styles and histories, I have heard similar comparisons from my audiences. This feedback further confirms what I knew from the beginning of this project: these early actresses are rhetorically significant. What has been most challenging is to show through historiography that female-focused drama that existed in the theater from the early 1660s until second decade of the eighteenth century does, in fact, constitute performed rhetoric. But the evidence clearly shows that female theatrical performance was a strong persuasive element in the discussion of the gender issues of the period and in fact helped shape the culture of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century England. Further study could help bring this rhetoric into the canon of Western historical rhetoric.

I would also like to recognize the further implications of this study in tying together rhetoric with dramatic performance. The relationship of performers, audiences, and the media within the context of popular culture is an area ripe for rhetorical exploration. So too is the rhetoric of the public self as idealized, debauched, subverted, and sometimes perverted. In terms of female performance, a rhetorical history of the actress as sex symbol needs to be done. I think there are many implications between the image of the actress and how girls and women develop their self images in our own culture. I can envision further rhetorical studies of actors and actresses as cultural sites, larger than life, in effect, public property with no private life. My study makes me wonder more about the vicarious interest in public personas and how this can develop into extreme rhetorical situations, such as the case of celebrity stalkers or of America's obsession with reality television shows. Perhaps many of these studies are already

underway in the field of rhetoric, but much more can be done. For my part, I plan to continue my research by seeking archival sources that add further evidence to the rhetorical lives of the Restoration and early eighteenth century actresses.

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